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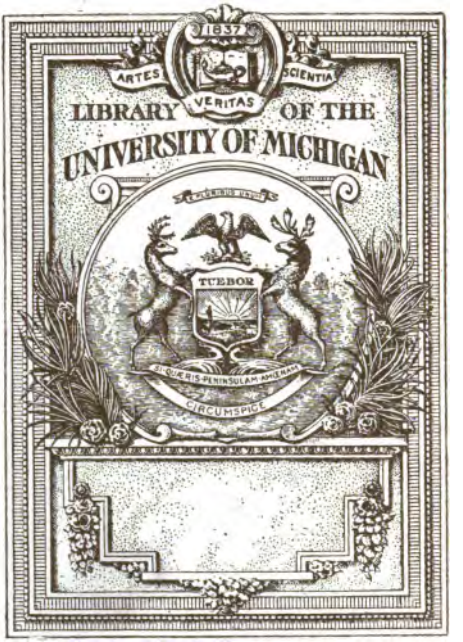

THE GIFT OF
E. W. Dean

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F229l

Elizabeth Whetten Kline

Huyot.

THE LAST TENANT.

BY L. FARJEON,

Author of "A Fair Jewess," Etc.

NEW YORK:

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	My Wife Makes Up her Mind to Move,	1
II.	House-Hunting à la Mode,	9
III.	An Old Friend Unexpectedly Presents Himself,	20
IV.	Bob Millet Gives us Some Curious Information about the House in Lamb's Terrace,	28
V.	We Look Over the House in Lamb's Terrace, and Receive a Shock,	43
VI.	The Answer to the Bell,	56
VII.	I Make Some Singular Experiments,	68
VIII.	I Take Bob into my Confidence,	80
IX.	I Pay Bob Millet a Visit,	87
X.	Ronald Elsdale Gives Opinions,	98
XI.	Bob Relates to me Some Particulars of Ronald Elsdale's Delusions,	106
XII.	A House on Fire,	116
XIII.	I Take the Haunted House,	124
XIV.	A Meager Report from the Inquiry Agent,	133
XV.	What the Inquest Revealed,	137
XVI.	In 79 Lamb's Terrace,	154
XVII.	Barbara,	167
XVIII.	Molly,	186
XIX.	Important Information,	195
XX.	Dr. Cooper,	203
XXI.	Barbara Gives us Some Valuable Information,	220

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	Mr. Nisbet Visits Lamb's Terrace,	236
XXIII.	On the Track,	252
XXIV.	We Arrive in Paris,	264
XXV.	We Come to a Halt,	277
XXVI.	A Good Night's Work,	290
XXVII.	A Word with Mme. Bernstein,	304
XXVIII.	Mme. Bernstein Reveals,	317
XXIX.	Dr. Cooper is Impressed,	329
XXX.	Mr. Nisbet Takes a Decided Step,	341

THE LAST TENANT.

CHAPTER I.

MY WIFE MAKES UP HER MIND TO MOVE.

FROM a peculiar restlessness in my wife's movements, I gathered that she was considering some scheme which threatened to disturb the peaceful surroundings of my life. Upon two or three occasions lately she had reproached me for not being sufficiently lofty in my social views, and although the tone in which she addressed me was free from acerbity, her words conveyed the impression that in some dark way I was inflicting an injury upon her. Familiar with her moods, and understanding the best way in which to treat them, I made no inquiries as to the precise nature of this injury, but waited for her to disclose it—which I was aware she would not do until she was quite prepared.

I am not, in any sense of the term, an ambitious man, being happily blessed with a peaceful and con-

ted mind which renders me unwilling to make any departure from my usual habits. As regards old-fashioned ways I am somewhat of a conservative; I do not care for new things and new sensations, and I am not forever looking up at persons above me, and sighing for their possessions and enjoyments. Indeed, I am convinced that the happiest lot is that of the mortal who is neither too high nor too low, and who is in possession of a competence which will serve for modest pleasures, without exciting the envy of friends and acquaintances. Such a competence was mine; such pleasures were mine. Secure from storms and unnecessary worries—by which I mean worries self-inflicted by fidgety persons, or persons discontented with their lot—I should have been quite satisfied to remain all my life in our cozy ten-roomed house, which we had inhabited for twenty years, and in which we had been as comfortable as reasonable beings can expect to be in life. Not so my wife, the best of creatures in her way, but lately (as I subsequently discovered) tormented with jealousy of certain old friends who, favored by fortune, had moved a step or two up the social ladder. It was natural, when these friends visited us, that they should dilate with pride upon their social rise, and should rather loftily, and with an air of superiority,

seize the opportunity of describing the elegances of their new houses and furniture. Their fine talk amused me, and I listened to it undisturbed; but it rendered my wife restless and uneasy, and the upshot of it was that one morning, during breakfast, she said:

"You have nothing particular to do to-day, my dear?"

"No, nothing particular," I replied.

"Then you won't mind coming with me to see some new houses."

I gasped. The murder was out.

"Some new houses!" I cried.

"You can't expect me to go alone," she said calmly. "It would hardly be safe—to say nothing of its impropriety—for a lady, unaccompanied, to wander through a number of empty houses with the street door shut. We read of such dreadful things in the papers."

"Quite true; they are enough to make one's hair stand on end. It would not be prudent. But what necessity is there for you to go into a number of empty houses?"

"How stupid you are!" she exclaimed. "You know we must move; you know that it is impossible for us to remain in this house any longer."

"Why not?"

"Such a question! And the house in the state it is!"

"A very comfortable state, Maria. There is nothing whatever the matter with it."

"There is everything the matter with it."

"Oh, if you say so——"

"I do say so."

A man who has been long married learns from experience, and profits by what he learns, if he has any sense in him. I am a fairly sensible man, and experience has taught me some useful lessons. Therefore I went on with my breakfast in silence, knowing that my wife would soon speak again.

"The house is full of inconveniences," she said.

"You have been a long time finding them out, Maria."

"I found them out years ago, but I have borne with them for your sake."

I laughed slyly, took the top off an egg, and requested her to name the inconveniences of which she complained.

She commenced. "We want a spare room."

"We have one," I said, "and it is never used."

"It isn't fit to use."

"Oh! I had an idea that there was no demand for it."

"If it was a comfortable room there would be,

Edward, I wish you would recognize that things cannot always remain as they are."

"More's the pity."

"Nonsense. You talk as if we were shellfish."

"It did not occur to me. Proceed with your wants, Maria."

"*Our* wants, my dear."

"Well, *our* wants."

"You want a nice, cozy study, where you can sit and smoke."

"I want nothing of the kind. I can sit and smoke anywhere. Don't forget that I am fifty years of age, and that my habits are fixed."

"My dear, it is never too late to learn."

"Keep to the point," I said.

"As if I am not keeping to it! I have no morning room."

"So you are to sit in your morning room, and I am to sit in my study, instead of sitting and chatting together, as we have always done. A cheerful prospect! What next?"

"We have very good servants," she said pensively.

"Has that anything to do with the inconveniences you speak of?"

"I shouldn't like to lose the girls, especially cook. They sleep in the attic, you know, and the roof is shockingly out of repair."

"It is the chronic condition of roofs. Go where you will, you hear the same story. Have the girls complained?"

"No, but I can see what is coming."

"Ah!"

"The kitchen is not what it should be; the range causes us the greatest anxiety. The next dinner party we give we must have the dinner cooked out. Think what a trouble it will be, and how awkward it will look. Everything brought to the table lukewarm, if not quite cold."

"The thought is heartrending."

"And you so particular as you are. I am not blaming you for these things, my dear."

"You are very considerate. Is your catalogue of ills finished?"

"By no means. Look at the wine cellar—it positively reeks. As for the store cupboard, not a thing can I keep in it for the damp. Then there's the bath. Every time I turn the hot water tap I am frightened out of my life. It splutters, and chokes, and gurgles—we shall have an explosion one day. Then there's——"

"No more!" I cried, in a tragic tone. "Give me two minutes to compose myself. My nerves are shattered."

I finished my eggs and toast, I emptied my breakfast cup, I shifted my chair.

"You wish to move," I then said.

"Do you not see the impossibility of our remaining where we are?" was her reply.

"Frankly, I do not, but we will not argue; I bend my head to the storm."

"Edward, Edward!" she expostulated. "Must not a woman have a mind? Must it always be the man?"

"I meant nothing ill-natured, Maria. Have you any particular house in view?"

"Several, and I have made out a list of them. I have been to the house agents and have got the keys. I did not wish you to have the bother of it, so I took it all on myself. And here are the orders to view the houses where there are care-takers. Of course we don't want the keys of those houses; all we have to do is to ring."

"How many empty houses are there on your list?"

"Twenty-three."

I repressed a shudder. "And you have the keys of——"

"Eleven. I can get plenty more. We must be careful they don't get mixed up. Perhaps you had better keep them."

"Not for worlds. Do you propose to go over the whole twenty-three to-day?"

"Oh, no, my dear, but we will continue till we are tired. With what I have and what I am promised I dare say it will be a long job before we are suited. Days and days."

"Perhaps weeks and weeks," I suggested faintly.

"Perhaps. Do you remember how we hunted and hunted till we found this house?"

"Can I ever forget it? I grew so sick of tramping about that I thought seriously of buying a traveling caravan, and living in it. Well, Maria, I confess I don't like the prospect, but as your mind is made up I will put a good face on it."

"I was sure you would, my dear. You are the best man in the world." And she gave me a hearty kiss.

"All right, my dear. When do we start?"

"I shall be ready in half an hour."

In less than that time we were off, I resigned to my fate, and my wife as brisk as a young maid about to enter into housekeeping for the first time. I could not but admire her courage. Her bag was stuffed with keys, and in her hand she carried a book in which were set down the particulars of the houses we were to look over.

CHAPTER II.

HOUSE-HUNTING À LA MODE.

IT was a satisfaction to me that my wife did not entertain the idea of deserting the northwestern part of London, in which I have lived from my boyhood, and which I regard as the pleasantest district in our modern Babylon. In no other part of London can you see in such perfection the tender green of spring, and enjoy air so pure and bracing, and there are summers when my wife agrees with me that it is a mistake to give up these advantages for the doubtful enjoyment and the distinct discomforts of a few weeks in the country. So, with my mind somewhat relieved, I started upon the expedition which was to lead me to the deserted house in Lamb's Terrace, and thence to the strange and thrilling incidents I am about to narrate. And I may premise here that I do not intend to attempt any explanation of them; I shall simply describe them as they occurred, and I shall leave the solution to students more deeply versed than myself in the mysteries of the visible and invisible life by which we are surrounded. I

must, however, make one observation. There is in my mind no doubt that I was the chosen instrument in bringing to light the particulars of a foul and monstrous crime, which might otherwise have remained unrevealed till the Day of Judgment, when all things shall be made clear. Why I was thus inscrutably chosen, and was haunted by the Skeleton Cat until the moment arrived when I was to lay my hand upon the shoulder of the criminal and say, "Thou art the man!" is to me the most awful and inexplicable mystery in my life.

In our search for a new house the story of one day is (with the single exception to which I have incidentally referred) the story of all the days so employed. We set out every morning, my wife fresh and cheerful, and I trotting patiently by her side; we returned home every evening worn out, disheartened, bedraggled, and generally demoralized. My condition was, of course, worse than that of my wife, whom a night's rest happily restored to strength and hope. I used to look at her across the breakfast table in wonder and admiration, for truly her vigor and powers of recuperation were surprising.

"Are you quite well this morning?" I would ask.

"Quite well," she would reply, smiling amiably at me. "I had a lovely night."

Wonderful woman! A lovely night! While I was tossing about feverishly, going up and down innumerable flights of stairs with thousands upon thousands of steps, opening thousands upon thousands of doors, and pacing thousands upon thousands of rooms, measuring their length, breadth, and height with a demon three-foot rule which mocked my most earnest and conscientious efforts to take correct measurements! The impression these expeditions produced upon me was that, of all the trials to which human beings are subject, house-hunting is incomparably the most exasperating and afflicting. Were I a judge with the power to legislate, I would make it a punishment for criminal offenses: "Prisoner at the bar, a jury of your countrymen have very properly found you guilty of the crime for which you have been tried, and it is my duty now to pass sentence upon you. I have no wish to aggravate your sufferings in the painful position in which you have placed yourself, but for the protection of society the sentence must be one of extreme severity. You will be condemned to go house-hunting, and never getting suited, from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night, for a term of three years, and I trust that the punishment inflicted upon you will deter you from crime for the rest of your nat-

ural life." I should almost be tempted to add, "And the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"

I could not have wished for a better leader than my wife, who continued to take charge of the keys and to keep a record of the premises we had looked over and were still to look over; and in the little book in which this record is made were set down in admirable English—occasionally, perhaps, somewhat too forcible—the reasons why there was not a single house to let which answered her requirements. Many of the houses had been tenantless for years, and reminded me in a depressingly odd way of unfortunate men who had fallen too soon into "the sere and yellow," and were sinking slowly and surely into damp and weedy graves. The discolored ceilings, the moldy walls, the moist basements, the woe-begone back yards, and the equally dismal gardens, the twisted taps, the rusty locks and keys, the dark closets which the agents had the effrontery to call bedrooms, supplied ample evidence that their fate was deserved. There were some in a better condition, having been newly patched and painted; but even to these more likely tenements there was always, I was ever thankful to hear, an objection, from one cause or another, raised by my wife. In one the dining room was too small; in another it was too large; in another

the bath was on an unsuitable floor—down in the basement or up on the roof; in another the range was old-fashioned; in another there was no getting into the garden unless you passed through the kitchen or flung yourself out of the drawing-room window; in another there were no cupboards, and so on, and so on, without end. Again and again did I indulge in the hope that she was thoroughly exhausted and would give up the hunt, and again and again did the wonderful woman, a few hours afterward, impart to me the disheartening news—smiling cheerfully as she spoke—that she had been to a fresh house agent and was provided with another batch of keys and "orders to view." After every knock-down blow she "came up smiling," as the sporting reporters say. Meekly I continued to accompany her, knowing that the least resistance on my part would only strengthen her determination to prolong the battle. At the end of a more than usually weary day she observed:

"My dear, if we were rich we would build."

"We would," I said, and, with a cunning of which I felt secretly proud, I encouraged her to describe the house she would like to possess. I am a bit of a draughtsman, and from the descriptions she gave me of the house that would complete her happiness I drew out the plans of an Ideal Resi-

dence which I was convinced could not be found anywhere on the face of the earth. This, however, was not my wife's opinion.

"It is the exact thing, Edward," she said, and she took my plans to the agents, who said they were very nice, and that they had on their books just the place she was looking for—with one trifling exception scarcely worth mentioning. But this trifling exception proved ever to be of alarming proportions, was often hydra-headed, and was always insurmountable. Then would she glow with indignation at the duplicity of the agents, and would call them names which, had they been publicly uttered, would have laid us open to a great number of actions for libel and slander. Thus a month passed by, and, except for prostration of spirits, we were precisely where we had been when we commenced. The Ideal Residence was still a castle in Spain.

One evening, when we were so tired out that we could hardly crawl along, my indomitable wife, after slamming the last street door behind her, informed me that she intended to call upon another house agent whom she had not yet patronized.

"That will be the ninth, I think," I said, in a mild tone.

"Yes, the ninth," she said. "They are a dreadful

lot. You can't place the slightest dependence upon them."

Gascoigne was the name of the agent we now visited, and he entertained us in the old familiar way. As a matter of course, he had the very house to suit us; in fact, he had a dozen, and he went through them *seriatim*. But my wife, who during the past month had learned something, managed, by dint of skillful questioning, to lay her hand on the one weak spot which presented itself in all.

"I am afraid they will not do," she said, "but we will look at them all the same."

I sighed; I was in for it once more. A dozen fresh keys, a dozen fresh orders to view—in a word, a wasted, weary week. Mr. Gascoigne drummed with his fingers on his office table, and, after a pause, said:

"I have left the best one to the last."

"Indeed!" said my wife, brightening up.

"The house that cannot fail," said he; "a chance seldom met with—perhaps once in a lifetime. I shall not have it long on my books; it will be snapped up in no time. It possesses singular advantages."

"Where is it?" asked my wife eagerly.

"In Lamb's Terrace, No. 79. Detached and charmingly situated. Ten bedrooms, three recep-

tion rooms, two bath rooms, hot and cold water to top floor, commodious kitchen and domestic offices, conservatory, stabling, coach house, coachman's rooms over, two stalls and loose box, large garden well stocked with fruit trees, and two greenhouses."

My wife's eyes sparkled. I also was somewhat carried away, but I soon cooled down. Such an establishment would be far beyond my means.

"To be let on lease?" I inquired.

"To be let on lease," Mr. Gascoigne replied.

"The rent would be too high," I observed.

"I don't think so. Ninety pounds a year."

"What?" I cried.

"Ninety pounds a year," he repeated.

I looked at my wife; her face fairly beamed. She whispered to me, "A prize! Why did we not come here before? It would have saved us a world of trouble."

For my part, I could not understand it. Ninety pounds a year! It was a ridiculous rent for such a mansion.

I turned to the agent. "Is there a care-taker in the house?"

"No," he replied, "it is quite empty."

"Has it been long unlet?"

"Scarcely any time."

"The tenant has only just left it, I suppose?"

"The tenant has not been living in it."

"He has been abroad?"

"I really cannot say. I know nothing of his movements. You see, we are not generally acquainted with personal particulars. A gentleman has a house which he wishes to let, and he places it in our hands. All that we have to do is to ascertain that the particulars with which he furnishes us are correct. We let the house, and there is an end of the matter so far as we are concerned."

I recognized the common sense of this explanation, and yet there appeared to me something exceedingly strange in such a house being to let at so low a rent, and which had just lost a tenant who had not occupied it.

"Is it in good repair?" I asked.

"Frankly, it is not; but that is to your advantage."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because the landlord is inclined to be unusually liberal in the matter. He will allow the incoming tenant a handsome sum in order that he may effect the repairs in the manner that suits him best. There is a little dilapidation, I believe, in one or two of the rooms, a bit of the flooring loose here and there, some plaster has dropped from the

ceilings, and a few other such trifling details to be seen to; and the garden, I think, will want attention."

"The house seems to be completely out of repair?"

"Oh, no, not at all; I am making the worst of it, so that you shall not be disappointed. But there is the money provided to set things in order."

"Roughly speaking, what sum does the landlord propose to allow?"

"Roughly speaking, a hundred pounds or so."

"About one-third," I remarked, "of what I should judge to be necessary."

"Not at all; a great deal can be done with a hundred pounds; and my client might feel disposed to increase the amount. You can examine the house and see if it suits you, which I feel certain it will."

Here my wife broke in. She had listened impatiently to my questions, and had nodded her head in approval of every answer given by the agent to the objections I had raised.

"I am sure it will suit us," she said. "The next best thing to building a house for one's self is to have a sufficient sum of money allowed to spend on one already built; to repair it, and paint and paper it after our own taste."

"I agree with you, madam," said the agent, "and you will find the landlord not at all a hard man to deal with. He makes only one stipulation—that whoever takes the house shall live in it."

"Why, of course we should live in it," said my wife. "What on earth should we take it for if we didn't?"

"Quite so," said the agent.

"I should like to ask two more questions," I said. "Are the drains in good order?"

"The drains," replied the agent, "are perfection."

"And is it damp?"

"It is as dry," replied the agent, "as a bone."

Some further conversation ensued, in which, however, I took no part, leaving the management to my wife, who had evidently set her heart upon moving to No. 79 Lamb's Terrace. The agent handed her the keys with a bow and a smile, and we left his office.

CHAPTER III.

AN OLD FRIEND UNEXPECTEDLY PRESENTS HIMSELF.

DURING the interview my attention had been attracted several times to a peculiar incident. At the extreme end of Mr. Gascoigne's office, close against the wall, was a high desk, with an old-fashioned railing around it, the back of the desk being toward me. When we entered the office no person was visible behind the desk, and no sounds of it being occupied reached my ears; but, happening once to look undesignedly in that direction, I saw a gray head raised above the railings, the owner of which was regarding me, I thought, with a certain eagerness and curiosity. The moment I looked at the head, which I inferred was attached to the body of a clerk in the service of Mr. Gascoigne, it disappeared, and I paid no attention to it. But presently, turning again, I saw it bob up and as quickly bob down; and as this was repeated five or six times during the interview, it made me, in turn, curious to learn the reason of the proceedings. Finally, upon my leaving the

office, the head bobbed up and remained above the desk, seemingly following my departure with increasing eagerness.

"My dear," said my wife, as we walked along the street—very slowly, because of the weary day we had had—"at last we have found what we have been searching for so long."

It did not strike me so, but I did not express my opinion. All I said was, "I am tired out, and I am sure you must be."

"I do feel tired, but I'm repaid for it. Yes, this is the very house we have been hunting for; just the number of rooms we want, just the kind of garden we want, and so many things we thought we couldn't afford. Then the stable and coach-house—not that we have much use for them, but it looks well to have them, and to speak of them to our friends in an off-hand way. Then the fruit trees—what money it will save us, gathering the fruit quite fresh as we want it! I have in my eye the paper for the drawing and dining rooms; and your study, my dear, shall be as cozy as money can make it. I have something to tell you—a secret. I have put away—never mind where—a long stocking, and in it there is a nice little sum saved up out of housekeeping pennies. That money shall be spent in decorating No. 79 Lamb's Terrace."

Thus rattled on this wonderful wife of mine, working herself into such a state of rapture at the prospect of obtaining the Ideal Residence I had drawn out for her, and which she believed she had obtained, that I could not help admiring more and more her sanguine temperament and her indomitable resolution. Her pluck, her endurance, her persistence, were beyond praise; such women are cut out for pioneers in difficult undertakings; they never give in, they never know when they are beaten. In the midst of her glowing utterances I heard the sound of rapid steps behind us, and, turning, saw the elderly man, whose head, bobbing up and down in Mr. Gascoigne's office, had so engaged my attention. He had been running after us very quickly, and his breath was almost gone.

"I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon," he said, speaking with difficulty, "but—excuse me, I must get my breath."

We waited till he had recovered, my wife with the expectation that he was charged with a message from Mr. Gascoigne, I with no such expectation. I felt that he had come after us on a purely personal matter, and as I gazed at him I had an odd impression that, at some period of my life, I had been familiar with a face like his. I could not, however, bring to my mind any person resembling him.

"The agent has given us the keys of the wrong house," whispered my wife. "I hope it is no worse than that; I hope he hasn't made a mistake in the rent."

She was in great fear lest the splendid chance was gone and the house in Lamb's Terrace was lost to us.

"I am all right now," said the stranger, "and I must beg you to excuse me if I am mistaken. I think not, for I seem to recognize your features; and yet it is so long ago—so long ago!"

The impression that I had known him in earlier years grew stronger.

"I heard your name," he continued, "while I was working at my desk. When you handed your card to Mr. Gascoigne he spoke it aloud, and I recognized it as that of an old school friend. It so stirred me that I fear you must have thought me rude for staring at you as I did. My name is Millet, Bob Millet—don't you remember?"

Good Heavens! My old schoolmate, Bob Millet, dear old Bob, almost my brother, whom I had not seen for nearly forty years, stood before me. What reminiscences did the sight of him inspire! He and I were chums in those early days, stood up for each other, defended each other, played truant together, took long walks, went into the country together during holiday time—did everthing, in

short, that could bind schoolboys in firm links of comradeship. Once, when my parents took me to the seaside, they invited Bob at my urgent request to spend a week with us, and he spent two, three—all the time, indeed, that we were away from home. There at the seaside he taught me to swim, and we had days of enjoyment so vivid that the memory of them came back to me fresh and bright even after this lapse of years. How changed he was! He was a plump, rosy-cheeked boy, and he had grown into a thin, spare, elderly man, with all the plumpness and all the rosiness squeezed clean out of him. It was a bit of a shock. He was younger than I, and he looked twenty years older; his clothes were shabby, his face worn and lined with care, as though life's battle had been too much for him; while here was I, a fairly prosperous man, full of vigor and capacity for enjoyment, and blessed with means for the indulgence of pleasures which it was evident he could not afford. There was on my part more of sadness than of joy in this meeting. I held out my hand to him, and we greeted each other cordially.

"My dear," I said to my wife, "this is my old school chum, Mr. Millet."

"Bob Millet, please," he said reproachfully; "don't drop me because I am shabby."

"I am not the sort of man to do that, Bob," I rejoined. "You have had a tussle with fortune, old friend, and got the worst of it?"

"Considerably," he replied, with a little laugh in which there was no bitterness; it reminded me that when he was at school he always took a cheerful view of any misfortune that happened to him; "but a meeting like this makes up for a lot. What does the old song say? 'Bad luck can't be prevented.' Well, I *am* glad to see you! I ran after you with a double purpose—first to shake hands with you, then to talk to you about that house you are looking after."

"All in good time. Have you done work for the day?"

"Yes."

"Come home with us and have a tea-dinner, unless," I added, "there is someone else expecting you."

"No one is expecting me," he said rather mournfully. "I am all alone."

"Not married?"

"I was, but I lost her."

I pressed his hand sympathetically.

"You can come along with us, then," said my good wife; "it will be better than passing the evening with yourself for company; and I am

burning to hear what you have to tell us about the house in Lamb's Terrace. I am fairly enchanted with it, even before I see it. There is our 'bus; I hope there is room for us."

There was room, and we got in, and alighted within thirty yards of our house—our dear old house, which my wife was bent upon giving up.

I took Bob to my dressing room, and we had a wash and a brush up.

"Any children?" he asked.

"No," I replied; "it caused us sorrow at first, but we get resigned to things."

"Yes, indeed."

Downstairs my wife was waiting for us, and there was our tea-dinner already prepared, with one or two additional small luxuries in honor of our visitor.

"Sit down, Bob," I said, "and make yourself at home. To you this is Liberty Hall; we haven't a bit of pride in us, although my dear wife here has an ambition for a larger house; that is why we are going to move."

"We can afford to move, Mr. Millet," said my wife with dignity.

"I am very glad to hear it," said Bob; "it is always pleasant to hear of a friend's good fortune."

My wife smiled kindly, and we all made a good meal; and then she bustled away to see to some domestic matters, while the maid cleared the table. Before she left the room she said to Bob:

"Mr. Millet, not a word about that delightful house until I join you."

CHAPTER IV.

BOB MILLET GIVES US SOME CURIOUS INFORMATION ABOUT THE HOUSE IN LAMB'S TERRACE.

"NOW, Bob," said I, "here's a clean pipe and some bird's eye. Do you remember our first cigar in your little bedroom in your father's house? How we suffered, and vowed never to smoke again! We have time for a pipe and a chat before my wife comes in. She has many virtues, Bob, and a special one for which she deserves a medal—she does not object to my smoking in any room in the house. Heaven knows what rules she will lay down, and what changes for the worse there will be when we move! I am not going to anticipate evils, however. Without pretending that I am a philosopher, I take things as they come, and try to make the best of them; it is the pleasantest way. Tell me what you have been doing all these years."

He told me all about himself—of his leaving school with fair expectations; of his entering into his father's business; of his marrying for love, and, after three years of happy married life, of the

death of his wife, and the ruin of his prospects; of his subsequent struggles and disappointments; and of his sinking lower and lower until he found himself fixed upon that depressing platform which is crowded with poor clerks struggling with all their might and main for bread and butter. Except when he spoke of his wife there was no sadness in his voice; and I saw that the cheerful temperament which had distinguished him when we were at school together had not deserted him.

"It has been a tussle," he said, "but I have managed to rub along, and it might have been worse than it is. You don't mind my calling you Ned, do you?"

"If I did," I replied, "I should have good reason to be ashamed of myself. It was Ned and Bob when we were boys; it is Ned and Bob now that we are elderly men. A few pounds more in my purse than in yours can make no difference; and as far as that goes, I can spare a little check if you need it."

"No, Ned," he responded quickly, "that is the last thing in the world I hope I shall have to do. Though I don't sit down to a banquet every day for dinner, I have never borrowed, and I never will if I can possibly help it. Don't judge me by my sad looks—I have a disagreeable impression that I

am not a cheerful fellow to contemplate; but if the truth were known there are much harder lots than mine. I have a comical trick of twisting things to my own advantage, and of rather pitying men who could sell me up over and over again. Ned, as there is no station in life, however high, without its miseries, so there is no station in life, however low, without its compensations."

"You're the philosopher, Bob," quoth I.

"I don't know about that. I have grown into the belief that the poor have as much enjoyment as the rich, and when I take a shilling's worth in the gallery of a theater, I am positive that I don't get less pleasure out of it than the people who sit in the stalls do out of their half-guineas. If I am a philosopher that is the use I make of my philosophy. Then, Ned, I have the past to think of; for three years there was no happier man than I, and my sad memories are sweetened with gratitude. And life is short after all; time flies; to-morrow we shall all be on a level, rich and poor alike."

Thus spoke my old schoolfellow, Bob Millet, in his shabby coat, and the regard I used to have for him grew stronger every minute that passed.

When my wife came in, bustling and cheerful as usual, she nodded brightly at us, sat down with a

piece of needlework in her hand—she is never idle, this wife of mine—and said:

"Now, Mr. Millet, let us hear about the house in Lamb's Terrace."

"I will tell you all I know. Have you the keys, Ned?"

"My wife has," I replied.

She opened her bag and took them out, remarking, as she wiped her fingers, that they were very dusty.

"As you see," observed Bob, "they are covered with rust."

"They could have been used very little lately," I said.

"Hardly at all," said Bob; "and this is one of the singular features in connection with the house with which you should be made acquainted. Did not the information Mr. Gascoigne gave you of the last tenant strike you as rather extraordinary?" He turned to my wife for an answer, but she did not reply.

"It struck me as very extraordinary," I said. "I could not understand it at all, nor can I now understand why a house, with so many rooms, with stabling, a large garden, and so many other advantages, should be offered at so low a rent."

Bob looked at me, looked at my wife, hesitated, coughed, cleared his throat, and spoke.

"As a matter of fact, the house has been empty for four or five years."

"Really a matter of fact?" inquired my wife. "Within your own knowledge?"

"Not exactly that; I can speak only of what I have gathered."

"So that your matter of fact," observed my wife shrewdly, "is merely hearsay."

"I must admit as much, I am afraid," he said a little awkwardly.

"Why should you be afraid to admit it?"

I detected in these questions one of my wife's favorite maneuvers. When she met with opposition to a project which she had resolved to carry out, she was in the habit of seizing upon any chance words which she could construe in such a way as to confuse and confound the enemy. Often had she driven me so hard that I have been compelled to beat a retreat in despair, and to give up arguing with her.

"Upon my word I don't know why," said Bob. "It was only a form of speech. I seem to be getting into a tangle."

"I will assist you to get out of it," said my wife, with playful severity. "Go on, Mr. Millet."

"It was originally taken on lease," continued Bob, "and the term having expired, the tenant—I suppose we must call him so—wished to renew.

The landlord says, 'I will renew on one condition, that you live in the house.' The tenant objects. 'What does it matter,' he says, 'whether I live in the house or not, so long as the rent is paid?' The landlord replies that it matters a great deal, that a house cannot be kept in a satisfactory condition unless it is occupied, and that he does not like to see his property fall into decay, as this house has been allowed to do."

"Did you hear these words pass, Mr. Millet?" asked my wife.

"No; I am only throwing into shape what I have gathered."

Here we were interrupted by a knock at the door, and my wife was called from the room to see a tradesman whom she had sent for to put some locks in order. As she left us she gave Bob rather a queer look. I took advantage of her absence by asking Bob why he hesitated when he began to speak about the house.

"Well," he answered, "this is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing your wife, and I don't know if she is a nervous woman."

"She is not easily frightened," I said, "but what has that to do with it?"

"Everything. I have heard that the house is haunted."

I clapped my hand on the table. "And that is the reason of the low rent?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"And that is why the last tenant did not live in it?"

"Ah," said Bob, "now you strike another key. There is a mystery here which I cannot fathom. Having a house on lease and being responsible for the rent, he is bound to pay till his term has expired. Very well—but here's the point, Ned: The lease having run out, and he having all these years presumably paid a large sum of money every quarter-day for value not received, why should he wish to renew? The house is haunted, he will not live in it, he never even opens the door to say how do you do to the property which is costing him so dear, and now that his responsibility is at an end he wants to take it upon his shoulders again, and to be allowed the privilege of continuing to pay his rent without receiving any return for it. Men don't usually throw their money away without some special reason, and this eccentric proceeding on the part of the last tenant makes one rather curious."

"It is certainly very mysterious," I observed. "What was the rent he paid for it?"

"I heard Mr. Gascoigne say a hundred and fifty pounds."

"And it is offered to us for ninety. Have you seen the house, Bob?"

"No."

"Mr. Gascoigne has, I suppose."

"I don't believe he has."

"Then how have you learnt all you have told me?"

"In this way. I was at my desk when the landlord—who is himself only a leaseholder, having to pay ground rent to a wealthy institution—called upon Mr. Gascoigne, and put the house into his hands. Mr. Gascoigne, when he wrote down the particulars, expressed, as you did, surprise at the low rent, and little by little all the particulars came out. There appeared to me to be some feeling between the landlord and the last tenant, but nothing transpired as to its nature while I was present, and it is my belief that Mr. Gascoigne is as much in the dark as I am. There had been trouble in obtaining the keys, I understood. A house agent, you know, never refuses business, and Mr. Gascoigne put the place on his books, but has not pushed it in any way. He did not mention it to you till he had exhausted the list of other available houses. It was only this morning that the rent was reduced in the books to ninety pounds, in accordance with instructions received from the

landlord, and it was probably in accordance with those instructions that Mr. Gascoigne made a strong effort to prepossess you in favor of it. Your wife may be in any moment. Is she to know that the house is haunted?"

I rubbed my forehead; I pondered; I laughed aloud.

"Tell her, Bob," I said; and then, at the idea of all her fond hopes being once more dashed to the ground, I fairly held my sides, while Bob gazed at me in wonder. I did not explain to him the cause of my hilarity; I had no time, indeed, for my wife re-entered the room, and resumed her seat and her needlework. I composed my features the moment I heard her footstep; she would certainly have asked why I was so merry, and any explanation I might have ventured to offer would have been twisted by her to my shame and confusion, and would, moreover, have made her more determined than ever to take the house.

"Where did we leave off, Mr. Millet?" she said, in a suspicious tone. "Let me see—I think it was about the house falling into decay."

"Never mind that just now, Maria," I said. "Bob has something of the utmost importance to impart to you. Brace your nerves—prepare for a shock."

There was a note of triumph in my voice, and she turned her eyes upon me, with an idea, I think, that I was going out of my mind.

"Well, Mr. Millet," she said, with a shrewd glance at him, "what is this something of the highest importance that you have to impart to me?"

"I was reluctant to mention it," said Bob, "before I spoke of it to Ned, because I was doubtful how it would affect you. If you should happen to hear of it when it was too late to retract you might say with very good reason, 'But why did not Mr. Millet tell us before we went over the house? Why did he leave us to find it out for ourselves after we signed the lease?'"

"Find what out, Mr Millet?"

"As a matter of fact," said Bob, and quickly withdrew the unfortunate phrase, "I mean that I have heard the house has a bad name."

She frowned.

"A bad name!"

"Bad, in a certain way, They say it is haunted."

"Oh," said my wife, smiling, "is that all? They say? Who say?"

"I can't give you names," replied Bob, conspicuously nonplused, "because I don't know them. I can only tell you what I have heard."

"I thought as much," she said, her eyes twink-

ling with amusement. "Merely hearsay. You might be more explicit, Mr. Millet. Haunted? By what?"

"I don't know."

"When does *It* appear?"

"I can't say."

"How tantalizing! Don't you think, Edward, that the news Mr. Millet has given us makes the house all the more interesting?"

Thus effectually did she sweep away all my fond expectations. She made no more of a haunted house than she would have done of a loose handle to a door.

"If that is the view you take of it," I said, "perhaps it does. I am always ready to please you, Maria, but till this moment I had no idea that your taste lay in the direction of haunted houses. At all events, you will not be able to say that you were not warned."

"You will not hear me say it. There is a proverb about giving a dog a bad name and hanging him at once, and it seems to me to apply to the house in Lamb's Terrace. If Mr. Millet could give us something to lay hold of I might express myself differently."

"You can't lay hold of a ghost, Maria, unless those gentry have undergone a radical change.

For my part, I am much obliged to Bob. It was out of consideration for you that he did not mention it at first."

"Mr Millet was very kind, I am sure," she said stiffly; and then, addressing him as though she would give him another chance, "Are you acquainted with the last tenant?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"What is his name?"

"I do not know."

"Where does he live?"

"I do not know."

"Now, *do* you think," she said, quizzing him, "that it is quite fair to take away the character of an empty house upon such slender grounds? It is like hitting a man when he's down, which I have heard is not considered manly."

"I assure you," replied Bob gravely, "that what I have said has been said with the best intentions."

"No doubt," said my wife composedly, meaning quite the other thing. "Edward, our best plan will be to go and look over the house the first thing in the morning."

"That settles it, Bob," I said, "for the present, at all events. What do you say to coming here tomorrow evening and hearing our report of the house?"

He looked at my wife, as if doubtful whether a

second visit would be agreeable to her; but she nodded pleasantly, and said:

"Yes, come, Mr. Millet; perhaps we shall be able to surprise you."

"Thank you," said Bob, and we talked of old times with rather eager readiness, and for the rest of the evening carefully avoided the subject which had so nearly brought him to grief. At ten o'clock he took his departure, and a few minutes afterward Maria and I retired to our bedroom.

"Good-night, dear," she said, in her most amiable tone, as I put out the light.

"Good-night, dear," I replied, and disposed myself for sleep.

We are both healthy sleepers, and generally go off like a top, as the saying is, a very short time after our heads touch the pillows. But this night proved to be an exception, for we must have lain quite a quarter of an hour in darkness when my wife began to speak.

"Are you asleep, Edward?"

"No, Maria."

"Do you know," she said drowsily, "I have a funny idea in my head."

"Have you?"

"Yes. It is that you and Mr. Millet laid a little plot for me."

"It isn't a funny idea, Maria; it is a perfectly absurd idea."

"That is what *you* say, dear; it is never agreeable to be found out. I dare say you thought yourselves very clever. It hasn't raised my opinion of Mr. Millet. I should have liked to believe him a different kind of person."

"Whatever are you driving at, Maria?" I said. "Bob Millet is the simplest fellow in the world, and is incapable of laying a plot."

"Oh, there's no telling. You were old playmates, and he is anxious to please you; he will find out by and by, perhaps, that I am not quite the simpleton he takes me for."

"Poor old Bob!" I thought. "His ill-luck sticks to him."

Aloud I said, "You are a conundrum, Maria; I shall give you up."

"Better give up the plot," she said pleasantly.

"I will, when I know what it is."

"It was this—that you would invent a ridiculous story about the house I have set my heart upon taking being haunted, so that I should be frightened to go near it. You ought to have known me better, Edward, and I must say you did it very clumsily; my consolation is that you did not

succeed. I am so sorry for you! Good-night, dear; I hope you will sleep well."

I did sleep fairly well, though I was kept awake longer than usual by my annoyance at the prejudice Maria entertained against my old friend Bob.

CHAPTER V.

WE LOOK OVER THE HOUSE IN LAMB'S TERRACE, AND RECEIVE A SHOCK.

WE rose earlier than usual the next morning, and my wife bustled about in lively expectation of a successful and pleasant day. She made no allusion to Bob Millet, and I, well acquainted with her moods, was aware that her silence was no indication that she was not thinking of him. My meeting with him had recalled agreeable memories, and I was sincerely sorry that he had not been successful in life's battle. I resolved to assist him if I could, though I could not exactly see a way to it, because of his aversion to borrowing money, and because, living retired as I was, with no business to attend to, it was out of my power to offer him a better situation than the one he occupied in Mr. Gascoigne's office. Anxious that my wife should have as high an opinion of him as I had myself, I made an effort to reinstate him in her good graces.

"I think, Maria," I said, during breakfast, "that you were inclined to do Bob an injustice last night. He had no desire whatever to set you against the

house in Lamb's Terrace, but only to give us some information which he considered it his duty not to withhold from us. He was perfectly sincere in all he said, and perfectly truthful, and you must admit that he did give us some strange news."

"Yes, he did," she replied, "and it remains to be proved whether it is true; we should not be too ready to believe all the idle gossip we hear."

"Undoubtedly we should not; but if there *is* anything against the place, it is better that we should hear it before we decide upon living in it. When I was a boy an aunt of mine took a house, and afterward discovered that a murder had been committed in her bedroom. She didn't have a moment's peace in her life; she used to wake up in the middle of the night, and fancy all sorts of things. I remember her spending an evening with us at home, and starting at the least sound; her nerves were shattered, and my poor dear mother said she couldn't live long. She told us stories of horrid sights she saw in the house, and horrid sounds she heard, and my hair rose on my head. I didn't sleep a wink myself that night. Now, if she had known all this before she took the house, she would have been spared a great deal of suffering."

"Did she die soon after?" asked my practical wife.

"No," I replied; and I could not help laughing at my defeat, the moral of the story being absolutely destructive of the theory I wished to establish; "as a matter of fact, she lived to a good old age."

"I don't quite see the application, Edward," said my wife dryly; and I deemed it prudent to change the subject. Maria is not an unreasonable or an unjust woman, and I gathered from her manner that she intended to hold over her final verdict upon Bob's character until she had ascertained what dependence could be placed upon the information he had given us.

Upon looking through the local directory, the only reference I could find to Lamb's Terrace was the name under the initial L, "Lamb's Terrace."

"It is singular," I said. "The number of the house we are going to is 79, and the presumption is that there are other houses in the terrace, with people living in them, yet there is no list of them in this directory."

My wife turned over the pages, but could find no further reference to the place.

"It *is* rather singular," she said, and handed me back the book.

A few minutes afterward we were on our way, having been informed by Mr. Gascoigne on the pre-

vious day that a North Star 'bus would take us to the neighborhood in which it was situated.

"How many houses are we going to look over?" I inquired.

"Only one," replied my wife, "and if that doesn't suit us I really don't know what we shall do."

With all my heart I wished that it would not suit us. Reluctant as I had been, when we first commenced these wearisome journeys, to remove from our old home, I felt now, after the experiences I had gone through, that it would be a positive misfortune.

Lamb's Terrace was not easy to find. The conductor of the North Star 'bus knew nothing of it, and said he had best take us as far as his conveyance went, and set us down. This was done, no other course suggesting itself to us; he took us as far as he went, and then cast us adrift upon the world. We made inquiries of many persons, and the replies we received added to our confusion. Women especially set their tongues wagging with astonishing recklessness, for they were totally ignorant of the subject upon which they were offering an opinion. But they gave instructions and advice, which we followed, for the reason that we did not know what else we could do. Some said

they thought Lamb's Terrace must lie in this direction; we went in this direction, and did not find it. Others said it must lie in that direction; and we went in that direction, with the same result. We requested sundry cabmen to drive us to 79 Lamb's Terrace, and they nodded their heads cheerfully and asked where Lamb's Terrace was. We could not inform them. "Do *you* know Lamb's Terrace?" they asked their comrades, who scratched their heads and passed the question along the rank, and eventually said they were blarmed (or something worse) if they did. The consequence was that they lost a fare, and that we were cast adrift again.

At length, after tramping about for nearly two hours, we found ourselves in what I can only describe as a locality which had lost its place in civilized society. It was deplorably desolate and forlorn, and its dismal aspect suggested the thought that it had been abandoned in despair. Fields had been dug up, but not leveled; roads had been marked out, but not formed; buildings had been commenced, but not proceeded with. Rubbish had been shot there freely. Empty cans, battered out of shape, broken bottles, dead branches, musty rags, useless pieces of iron and wood, and the worst refuse of the dustbin, lay all around. If there had ever been a time in its history—and it seemed as if

there had been, and not so very long ago—when it deserved to be regarded as a region of good intentions, its character was gone entirely, and it could now only be regarded as a region of desolation. Wandering about this mournful region, my wife suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, here it is!"

And there it was. A narrow thoroughfare, not wide enough for two vehicles to pass each other, with the words "Lamb's Terrace" faintly discernible on the crumbling stones.

"Shall we go on?" I asked.

"Of course we will go on," replied my wife. "What did we come out for? And after the trouble we have had to get here!"

We turned at once into the narrow lane. On the right-hand side was a gloomy house, untenanted. Beyond this was a long wall, very much out of repair. On the opposite side there were no houses at all, but another long wall, also very much out of repair. I searched for the number of the gloomy untenanted house, but could not see one, and my wife suggested that the house we wanted was lower down. We went lower down, and passed the gloomy house a distance of fifty or sixty yards, between the said walls. So still and deathlike was everything around, and so secluded did Lamb's

Terrace appear to be that I regarded it as being not only lost to society, but almost out of the world.

I glanced at my wife, and saw on her face no traces of disappointment. Her spirits were not so easily dashed as mine.

Having traversed these fifty or sixty yards we came to the end of the right-hand wall. Adjoining it was a large building, in rueful harmony with all the depressing characteristics of the neighborhood. The house was approached by a front garden choked up with weeds and rank grass, and inclosed by rusty and broken railings; at the end of this garden was a flight of stone steps. The gate creaked on its hinges as I pushed it open, and a prolonged wheeze issued from the joints; the sound was ludicrously and painfully human, and resembled that which might have been uttered by a rheumatic old woman in pain. My wife pushed past me, and I followed her up the flight of stone steps.

"There is a number on the door," she said, tip-toeing. "Yes, here it is, 79, almost rubbed out."

"Numbers 1 to 78," I grimly remarked, "must be somewhere round the corner, if there is any round the corner in the neighborhood; they are perhaps two or three miles off."

"My dear," said my wife bravely, "don't be prejudiced. Here is the house; what we have to do is to see whether it will suit us."

"You would not care to go into it alone," I said.

"I should not," she admitted, with praiseworhy candor; "but that is not to the point."

I thought it was; but I did not argue the matter. She had removed from the keys as much rust as she could, and had had the foresight to bring with her a small bottle of oil, without the aid of which I doubt if we should have been able to turn the key in the lock. After a deal of trouble this was accomplished, and the mysterious tenement was open to us; as the door creaked upon its hinges, the sound that tortured my ears was infinitely more lugubrious than that which had issued from the gate, and it produced upon me the same impression of human resemblance. When we entered the hall I asked my wife whether I should close the street door.

"Certainly," she said. "Why not?"

I did not answer her. Have her way she would, and it was useless to argue with her. I closed the door, and felt as if I had entered a tomb.

The entrance hall was spacious, and shaped like an alcove; there was a door on the right, and another on the left; in the center was a wide stair-

case, leading to the rooms above; farther along the passage was a masked door, leading to the rooms below.

"Upstairs or downstairs first?" I inquired.

"Downstairs," my wife replied.

The stairs to the basement were very dark, and my wife, prepared for all such emergencies, produced a candle and matches. Lighting the candle we descended to the stone passage. There was a dreary and gloomy kitchen; there was a large scullery, a larder and all necessary offices, cobwebbed and musty; also two rooms which could be used as living rooms. The glass-paneled doors of both these rooms opened out into the back garden, which was in worse condition and more choked up with weeds, and rank grass, and monstrous creepers than the ground in front of the house; two greenhouses were at the extreme end, and there were some trees dotted about, but whether they were fruit trees it was impossible to say without a closer examination.

"I don't think," said my wife, "we will go over the garden just now. It looks as if it was full of creeping things."

"The rooms we have seen are not much better, Maria."

"They are not, indeed; I never saw a place in such a dreadful state."

I was more than ordinarily depressed. As a rule these expeditions invariably had a dispiriting effect upon me, but I had never felt so melancholy as I did on this occasion. I made no inquiry into my wife's feelings; I considered it best that she should work out the matter for herself; the chances of my emerging a victor from the contest in which we were engaged would be all the more promising.

We ascended to the hall, and then I observed to my wife that we had forgotten to examine the stabling and the wine cellar; we had even neglected the coal cellars.

"We won't bother about them to-day," she said, and despite my despondency I inwardly rejoiced.

I had also learned to prepare myself for the trials of this house-hunting. In my side pocket were two flasks, one containing water, the other brandy. I had often grown faint during our wanderings, and a sup of brandy now and then had kept up my strength. I saw that my wife was lower spirited than usual, and I mixed some spirits and water in the tin cup attached to one of the flasks. She accepted the refreshment eagerly, and I took a larger draught myself, and was much cheered by it.

"It always," said my wife, in a brighter tone, "makes one feel rather faint to look over a house which has been empty a long time, especially a

house which is so far away from—from any others."

"It is almost as if we were in a grave," I observed.

"How *can* you say such dreadful things!" she retorted. "If I were a man I should have more courage."

There were three rooms on the ground floor, each of considerable dimensions, and all in shocking dilapidation. The paper had peeled off the walls, and was hanging in tattered strips to the ground; quantities of plaster had dropped from the ceilings, and here and there the bare rafters were exposed; there were holes in the flooring; the grates were cracked, the hearths broken up.

"A hundred pounds," I observed, "would not go far toward making this house habitable."

"It wouldn't be half enough," said my wife.

Upon quitting the dining room I inquired whether she wished to go any further.

"I am going," she said stoutly, "all over the house."

Upstairs we went to the first floor, where we found the rooms in a similar condition to those below.

"Disgraceful!" exclaimed my wife. "No wonder the landlord was indignant with the last tenant."

In due course we found ourselves on the second floor, and we stood in a large room, the windows of which faced the garden in the rear. I had opened the door of this room with difficulty, and the moment we entered it slammed to, which I ascribed to the wind blowing through some broken panes. By this time I perceived plainly that my wife's spirits were down to zero, and I was comforted by the reflection that looking over a house so wretched, so forlorn, so woe-begone, would, after all we had gone through, be the last straw that would break the back of her determination to move. We had been in the house about half an hour, and nothing but her indomitable spirit had sustained her in the trying ordeal.

In the room in which we were now standing there were two bell-pulls; one was broken, the other appeared to be in workable condition. It was not to prove this, but out of an idle humor as I thought at the time—though I was afterward inclined to change my opinion, and to ascribe the action to a spiritual impulse—that I stepped to the unbroken bell-pull, and gave it a jerk. It is not easy to describe what followed. Bells jangled and tolled and clanged as though I had set in motion a host in of infernal and discordant tongues of metal, and had raised the dead from their graves to take

part in the harsh concert, for indeed there seemed to be something horribly fiendish, in the discord, which was at once hoarse, strident, shrill, and sepulchral, and finally resolved itself into a low, muffled wail which ran through the house like a funereal peal. With the exception of our own voices and footsteps and the slamming of the doors we had opened and shut, these were the only sounds we had heard, and they brought a chill to our hearts.

"How awful!" whispered my wife.

I nodded, and held up my hand. The last echo of the bells had died away, and now there came another sound, so startling and appalling that my wife clutched me in terror.

"My God!" she cried; "someone is coming upstairs!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANSWER TO THE BELL.

WE stood transfixed with fear.

As I have said, we were on the second floor, and the sound which now filled us with apprehension proceeded from the lower part of the house. It was very faint, and I judged—though in such circumstances but small reliance could be placed upon any judgment I may have formed—that if human feet produced it they must have been encased in soft shoes or slippers. It has ever since been to me a matter for wonder how a sound so fine could have reached our ears from that distance. It must have been that our senses, refined instead of dulled by the despair which held us spellbound, were preternaturally sharpened to catch the note of warning which at any other time would have been inaudible.

At the moment, therefore, of my wife's frenzied exclamation I inferred that the feet had left the kitchen and were on the stairs leading from the basement to the hall. If my surmise was correct there were still two flights of stairs to ascend before the full horror of the incident would be revealed to us.

I have described the impression produced upon me when we first turned into Lamb's Terrace, of being, as it were, cut off from the world. There was not an inhabited house near us. We had not seen a human being in the thoroughfare, and, as the prospect, from the windows of the room in which we now stood, stretched across a bare and desolate waste of ground, there was absolutely no hope of any helpful response being made to our appeals for assistance.

The possibilities of the peril in which we had placed ourselves presented themselves vividly to my agitated mind. The house, having been for so many years deserted by its proper tenant, might have become the haunt of desperate characters who would shrink from no deed, however ruthless, to secure their safety; who might even hail with satisfaction the intrusion of respectable persons who had unconsciously put themselves in their power. Supposing that these evil-doers were concealed in the lower rooms when we entered, they could rob and murder us with little fear of discovery. But there was also the consoling reflection that they might be in the house with no sinister designs, and that their only anxiety now was to escape from a building into which they had made an unlawful entrance. This would soon be put to the proof.

If, when they were on the landing of the ground floor, we heard the street door open and shut, the fears which oppressed us would be dispelled, and we should be able to breathe freely.

I perceived that my wife was animated by a similar hope, and we both strained our ears in the endeavor to follow with our terrified senses the progress of the sound.

It ceased awhile on the ground floor, and we listened in agonized suspense for the click of a latch and the harsh creak of rusty hinges, but no such comforting sounds reached our ears, and presently the dead silence was broken by the soft pit-pat of footsteps on the stairs leading to the first floor. My wife's hold upon me tightened.

"We are lost!" she moaned. "What shall we do —oh, what shall we do?"

I had no weapon about me with the exception of a small penknife, which was practically useless in such an encounter as that in which I expected soon to be engaged. A peaceful citizen like myself had no need to carry weapons. I looked around the room for one. There was not an article of furniture in it—not a stick. I would have given the world for an ax or a piece of iron with which I could have made some kind of defense. We were absolutely helpless and powerless, and it was my

terror that made me certain that we were threatened by more than one enemy. To go from the room and meet the persons who were advancing toward us would be an act of madness, and would in all probability but hasten our fate. We must remain where we were, and wait for events; no reasonable alternative was open to us.

Pat, pat, pat, came the sound to our ears; nearer, nearer, nearer; not boldly, as if those from whom it proceeded were engaged upon an open and honest mission, but stealthily and covertly, as though they desired all knowledge of their movements to be concealed from their victims.

The footsteps had now reached the landing of the first floor and, after another deathlike pause, commenced to ascend the stairs which led directly to us.

"Can't you do something, Edward?" whispered my agonized wife, wringing her hands. "Can't you lock the door?"

It is strange that the fact of the door being unlocked had not occurred to me before. I rushed to it instantly, and a sigh of intense relief escaped me at finding the key in the lock. I turned it like lightning, and we were so far safe. Then my wife flew to the window, and, throwing it open, began to scream for help—that is to say, she would have

screamed if she had had the power, but her voice was almost frozen in her throat, and the sounds that issued from her were of a ravenlike hoarseness, and could have traveled but a few yards; too short a distance in our lonely situation to be of any practical value. Soon I added my shouts to her hoarse scream. They were sent forth to a dead world; to our frantic appeals no answer was made.

Meanwhile, occupied as I was, I could still pay some attention to what was passing on the stairs that led to the room. I had indulged in a faint hope that our cries would alarm those without, and would induce them to forego their murderous attack upon us, but the stealthy pat, pat, pat of the footsteps continued, and were now in the middle of the staircase; there could be but a few more stairs to ascend. Still another hope remained—that when the footsteps reached the second landing they would proceed onward to the top of the house. This last hope, like those which had preceded it, was not fulfilled. Nearer, nearer, nearer they approached, until they were close to the door; then there was another pause; no further sounds were heard.

My impression now was that the villains who had a design against us—for by this time I entertained no doubt of their diabolical purpose, and that we

were in the direst peril—were making preparations to carry it into effect. Presently they would try the handle of the door, and, discovering that it was locked, would burst it open and spring upon us.

A long and awful silence ensued, during which the agonizing question occupied my mind, what was being done outside the door? The torture of the suspense was maddening; the silence was more harrowing than the footsteps themselves had been. I was soon to receive an appalling answer to the question.

The door—notwithstanding my firm belief that I had securely locked it—slowly and noiselessly opened. My heart beat wildly, but I held myself ready, so far as lay in my poor power, to meet the attack with which we were threatened. And now the door stood wide open, and I saw no form of man or woman. But gradually there shaped itself in the air the outline of a female shape, a shadow, which as I gazed grew more distinct, and yet was never quite vivid to my sight. It was the figure of a young girl, poorly dressed, with carpet slippers on her feet. Her hair was hanging loose, and the tattered remnants of a cap attached to it was an indication that her station in life was—or more properly speaking, had been—that of a domestic servant. Her face was white and wan, and her

large gray eyes were fixed mournfully upon me. There was a dead beauty in their depths which seemed to speak of glowing hopes of youth prematurely blasted and destroyed, and, though the features of the apparition were but airy outlines, I could not fail to perceive that in a bygone time they had been comely and prepossessing.

More terrible than any form of living man or woman was this appalling spectacle as it stood, silent and still, upon the threshold. Had the bell I rang summoned it from the grave? For what purpose had it come? What did it require of me? It is probable that I should have mustered courage to ask some such questions as these, and indeed I was aware that my lips were moving, but no sound issued from them—my voice was gone; I could not utter an audible sound.

For several minutes, as it seemed to me, though it could not have been so long, did I continue to gaze upon the figure. I had directed a brief glance at its feet, but when my eyes traveled up to its face they became magnetized, as it were. The spell was broken by a movement on the ground, not proceeding from the apparition of the girl. I looked down, and there, gliding past the upright spectral figure, I saw creeping toward me a skeleton cat.

It was veritably a skeleton, and was to my sight

as impalpable as the young girl. Through its skin, almost bare of hair, its bones were sharply outlined. It was black; its ears were pointed, its eyes were yellow, its mouth was open, showing its sharp teeth.

This second apparition added to my horror, which grew deeper and deeper as the cat, with gliding motion, approached me. Had its paws left upon the ground a bloody imprint I could not have been more awestricken. It paused a few inches from me, where it crouched motionless so long as I remained so. When I moved it accompanied me, and when I stopped it stopped, waiting for a mandate from me to set it in motion.

Raising my eyes to the door I discovered to my amazement that the figure of the girl had vanished. Nerving myself to the effort, I stepped softly into the passage and gazed along and at the staircases above and below me, but saw no movement of substance or shadow. Returning to the room I was irresistibly impelled by a desire to convince myself whether the cat which had accompanied me to and fro was as palpable to touch as to sight. Kneeling to put this to the test I found myself kneeling on my wife's dress. So engrossed had I been in the astounding apparitions that I had paid no attention to her, and now I saw that she had fainted. Before

devoting myself to her I passed my hand over the cat and came in contact with nothing in the shape of substance. It was truly a specter, and I beheld it as clearly as I beheld the body of my wife lying at my side.

I took my flask from my pocket and bathed my wife's forehead, and poured a few drops of brandy and water down her throat, and I was presently relieved by seeing her eyes open. She closed them again immediately, and said, in a whisper:

"Is it gone?"

Anxious to learn what she had seen—for I inwardly argued that I might myself be the victim of a strange delusion—I met her inquiry by asking:

"Is what gone, Maria?"

"The girl," she murmured; "that dreadful figure that came into the room?"

"Look for yourself," I said.

It was not without apprehension that I made the request, and I nervously followed the direction of her eyes.

"It is not in the room," she sighed. "But, Edward, who opened the door?"

"The wind blew it open, most likely."

"You locked it, Edward! I heard you turn the key in the lock."

"I thought I did, but I must have been mistaken,

Terrified as we were, how could we trust the evidence of our senses? And do you suppose there's a lock in the house in proper order?"

"It must have been my fancy. Did *you* see nothing?"

How should I answer her? Revive her terror by telling her that she was under no delusion, but that the spectral figure of the young girl had really presented itself; or, out of kindness to her, strive to banish her fears by a pardonable falsehood?

Before I decided how to act I felt it necessary to ascertain whether the cat lying in full view to me was visible to her.

"Maria," I said, "take the evidence of your senses. Look round the room—at the door, at the walls, at the ceiling, on the floor—and tell me what you see."

With timid eyes she obeyed, and glanced in every direction, not omitting the spot upon which the skeleton cat was lying.

"I don't see anything, Edward."

"Does not that prove that the figure you spoke of was a trick of the imagination?"

"You actually saw nothing?"

"Nothing."

All this time she had been sitting on the floor, keeping tight hold of me. I assisted her to her

feet; she was so weak that she could hardly stand.

"For Heaven's sake!" she said "do not let us remain in the house another minute."

I was as anxious to leave as she was, and had I been alone I should have rushed downstairs in blind haste, but I had to attend to my wife. The power of rapid motion had deserted her, and when we were about to pass through the passage she shrunk back, fearing that the apparition of the young girl was lurking there. She experienced the same fear as we descended the stairs, and clung to me in terror when we approached an open door. I was grateful that the apparition of the cat—which followed us faithfully down to the hall—was invisible to her; if it had not been she would have lost her senses again, and it would have been hard work for me to carry her out, as she is by no means of a light weight.

The question which now agitated me was whether the cat would come into the streets with us, or would return to the resting place which should have been its last. It was soon and plainly answered.

I opened the street door, and stood upon the threshold. The cat stood there also. I paused to give it the opportunity of returning, but it evinced

no desire to do so. I went down the stone steps to the front garden; the cat accompanied me. I walked through the front garden out of the gate, straight into Lamb's Terrace, and thence across the wretched wastes of ground into more cheerful thoroughfares; and the skeleton cat was by my side the whole of the time.

The evidence of civilized life by which we were now surrounded restored Maria's spirits; she found her tongue.

"Why did you stop on the doorstep, Edward?" she asked.

"I had to lock the street door," I answered.

"We will not take that house, my dear," she said.

"No, we will not take it."

Some unaccustomed note in my voice struck her as strange.

"Is anything the matter with you?" she asked.

"No," I replied, glancing at the cat, "nothing."

"What are you looking at? Why are your eyes wandering so?"

"My dear," I said, with an attempt to speak in a lively tone, and failing dismally, "I must be a bit unstrung, that is all."

She accepted my explanation as satisfactory.

"No wonder," she said; "I would not go through such another trial for all the money in the world."

CHAPTER VII.

I MAKE SOME SINGULAR EXPERIMENTS.

FOR a little while we walked along in silence, and then I asked my wife whether she would ride or walk home.

"I should prefer to walk," she said; "it is early, and the air is fresh and reviving. Things look all the brighter now we are out of that horrible place. A walk will do us good."

I made no demur, though I was curious to see what the skeleton cat would do when we entered an omnibus full of people. It would experience a difficulty in finding a place on the floor of the 'bus, and there would be no room for it to stretch itself comfortably on the seats. I wished to ascertain, also, whether among a number of strangers there would be one to whom it would make itself visible. I peered into the faces of the passers-by with this thought in my mind, but I saw no expression of surprise in them, notwithstanding that the cat seemed to touch their legs in brushing past. Again and again did I turn my eyes away from the apparition; and again and again, looking down at my

feet, I beheld it as clearly as if it were an actual living example of its species. Once we got into a crowd and I hoped that I had lost it. No such luck; it evinced no disposition to leave me.

"Edward," said my wife, "I am sure you are not well. I have tired you out with this eternal looking over houses to let. You have been very patient with me"—she pressed my arm affectionately—"and I will try and make it up to you. I know you never really wished to move."

"I never wished it, Maria."

"And you have gone through all this for my sake. I don't like to give up a thing once I have set my mind on it,—you know that of old, my dear,—but the experiences of this morning will last me a lifetime; so I will give this up."

"The idea of moving?" I asked in a dull voice. "You give it up altogether?"

"Yes, altogether. We will remain in our old house."

It is a singular confession to make, but this proclamation of the victory I had gained afforded me no satisfaction. I had no wish to move; my earnest desire was to remain where we were; but with the infernal cat gliding by my side, I could think of nothing but the haunted house in Lamb's Terrace which we had just quitted. In that house

was the spectral figure of the girl who, by spiritual means, had opened a door I had locked, and presented herself to me. She was now alone. I had deprived her of a companion who, for aught I knew, might have been a solace to her. It was as if I had been guilty of a crime; as if I had condemned her to solitude. But it was folly to torment myself with such reflections. What had I to do with the incidents of this eventful day? I was a passive instrument, and was being led by unseen hands. More pertinent to ask what was the portent of the apparitions, and why the supernatural visitation was inflicted upon me, although to these questions I could expect no answer. Involuntarily I stooped to assure myself once more that the cat was but a shadow.

"What are you stooping for?" inquired my wife.

"I thought I had dropped my handkerchief."

"It is here, in your pocket." She took it out and handed it to me.

"I was mistaken," I muttered.

She held up her sunshade and hailed a passing hansom, saying energetically, and with a troubled look at me, "We will ride home."

I did not object. I think if she had said "We will fly home," I should have made an attempt to fly, so absolutely was I, for the time, deprived of

the power of deciding my own movements. I did not see the cat spring into the cab, but directly we were seated, there it lay crouched in front of us; and when the driver pulled up at our house there it was waiting for the street door to be opened.

"Lie down and rest yourself for an hour," said my wife, with deep concern in her voice.

"No," I replied, "I will smoke a pipe in the garden."

With wifely solicitude she filled my pipe for me, and held a lighted match to the tobacco. I puffed up, thanked her with a look, and went into the garden accompanied by the cat.

In the part of London in which we live there are pleasant gardens attached to many of the houses, and our little plot of ground is by no means to be despised. It is some ninety feet in length, is divided in the center by a broad graveled space, and has a graveled walk all around it; and here when the weather permits, my wife and I frequently sit and enjoy ourselves. I am also the proud possessor of a greenhouse, which, as well as the borders and beds I have laid out, is in summer and autumn generally bright with flowers, of which I am very fond; and into this greenhouse I walked to smoke the green fly, which was doing its worst for my pelargoniums. There are a couple of trees

in my garden, and birds' nests in them. The birds were flitting among the branches, and I looked at the cat, wondering whether it would spring after its feathered victims.

It took no notice of them, nor they of it. I remained in the greenhouse ten or twelve minutes, and then it occurred to me to make an experiment. With a swift and sudden motion I left the greenhouse and pulled the door behind me, shutting the cat inside. I walked toward the center of the garden, and the animal I thought I had cunningly imprisoned glided on at my side. Doors shut and locked, and doubtless stone walls, presented no greater obstacle to the creature than the air I breathed.

I sat down on the garden seat and smoked and pondered, and was aroused by a soft purring at my feet, and the contact of a furry body against my legs. I uttered an exclamation, and, looking down, saw our own household cat—a tortoise-shell tabby —rubbing against me. Now, thought I, there will be a fight. But there was nothing of the kind. I felt convinced that the skeleton cat saw our tortoise-shell cat, and presently I was quite as convinced that the flesh and blood reality was unconscious of the presence of the disembodied spirit.

I made another experiment. I went stealthily into the kitchen, and filled a saucer with milk. This saucer I took into the garden and put upon the gravel before the two cats.

"You must be hungry," I said aloud to the spectral figure, with a feeble attempt at jocularity. "Lap up."

It made no movement. With a look of gratitude at me our tabby lapped up the whole of the milk, and licked the saucer dry.

My wife came out and, seeing what I had done, smiled.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked solicitously.

"There is nothing whatever the matter with me," I said, with an unreasonable show of irritation.

She wisely made no reply, and I was once more left alone with my supernatural companion.

Thus passed the day, and I was glad when the hour arrived for Bob Millet to make his appearance. He came punctually and was cordially received by my wife.

"You are in time for tea, Mr. Millet," she said, shaking hands with him. "I want you to feel that you are really welcome here."

"Indeed I do feel so," said Bob, gratified by this reception, which I fancy he hardly expected.

They made a good meal, but though my wife

had thoughtfully prepared a dish of which I was very fond—a tongue stewed with raisins—I ate very little.

"No appetite, Ned?" said Bob.

I shook my head gloomily.

"He is out of sorts, Mr. Millet," said my wife, "and I am delighted you are here to cheer him up. He has me to thank for his low spirits; it is all because of my stupid wish to leave the house in which we are as comfortable as we could reasonably hope to be. I have worried him to death, almost, dragging him about against his will—though he has never complained—from morning till night for I don't know how long past. He is not half the man he was; he doesn't eat well and he doesn't sleep well, and I am to blame for it."

She was ready to cry with remorse, and I felt ashamed of myself for not having the strength to battle with the delusion which surely would not torture me forever.

I patted her on the shoulder, and put on a more cheerful countenance. She brightened up instantly, and then Bob asked whether we had been to 79 Lamb's Terrace.

"Yes, we have," said my wife, "and I am truly thankful that we got out of it safely."

"Ah!" said Bob, lifting his eyes.

"You were right, Mr. Millet," said my wife, "the house is haunted."

"Oh," said Bob, "I only told you what I had heard. For my part, I don't even know where Lamb's Terrace is."

"Take my advice, Mr. Millet, and don't try to know. The less you see of the place the better it will be for you."

"Why?"

"Because it *is* haunted," she replied with emphatic shakes of her head, "and I am much obliged to you for putting us on our guard."

"Then you saw something?"

My wife looked at me.

"Tell him what you fancy you saw," I said.

"It was not fancy," she rejoined; "I have been thinking over it during the day, and the more I think, the more I am convinced that I did see—what I saw."

"I should like to hear about it," said Bob.

"You shall."

And she told him all; of our going over the house till we got to the room on the second floor, of my pulling the bell, of the sounds we had heard proceeding from the basement and approaching nearer and nearer till they were outside in the passage, of my locking the door, of the door opening

of its own accord, and of the appearance on the threshold of the specter of a young girl, and, finally, of her fainting away.

"It was only my obstinacy," she said, "that took us up to the top of the house. Edward was quite ready to leave it before we had been in the place two minutes, but I insisted upon going into all the rooms, and I was properly punished for it. I was frightened enough, goodness knows, before I fainted, for I was chilled all over by what I had already seen, and I ought to have been satisfied; but you know what women are, Mr. Millet, when they take a fancy into their heads."

"There, Bob," said I, "there's a confession to make; not many women would say as much."

Bob smiled, and said, "You are too hard on yourself. We are much of a muchness—men and women alike; there is nothing to choose between us."

"You are very good to say so, Mr. Millet."

"When you recovered from your faint," said Bob, "was the figure still there?"

"No, it was gone."

"And you did not see it again?"

"No, thank God!"

"Did you see it?" asked Bob, turning to me.

"He says he didn't," said my wife, quickly replying for me, "but——"

"But," I added, "she does not believe me."

"How can I believe you," said my wife reproachfully, "when the very moment before I swooned away I saw your eyes almost starting out of your head with fright."

"Oh, well," I said, "I suppose I have as much right to fancy things as you."

"Of course you have, and it was very considerate of you to deny that you saw anything. He is the best husband in the world, Mr. Millet, and if he thinks I don't appreciate him he is mistaken."

"Now, my dear," I said soothingly, "you know I don't think anything of the sort; if I am the best husband in the world, so are you the best wife in the world. What do you say to our going in for the flitch of bacon?"

"It is all very well to make a laughing matter of it," said my wife seriously. "I will ask Mr. Millet this plain question. He may say, like you, that it is all fancy; but pray how does he account for the opening of a locked door?"

"I told you," I interposed before Bob could speak, "that I must have been mistaken in supposing I had locked it."

"Very good. But the door was shut if it was not locked."

"I don't deny that it was."

"How did it come open, then?"

"I told you that, too," I replied. "The wind."

"What wind?"

"The wind from the window through the broken panes."

She turned to Bob triumphantly. "What do you think of that, Mr. Millet? When we go into the room the door slams, and my husband says it slams because of the wind through the window. I accept that as reasonable, but is it reasonable to suppose that the same wind that blows a door shut from the inside of a room should blow it open from the outside?"

"Well, no," said Bob, with a sly look at me; "I should say it was not reasonable."

I was fairly caught. My wife's logic was too much for me.

"And now," said she, "as I know it will worry him if I go on talking about it, I will leave you two gentlemen together while I go and look after some affairs. You will spend the evening with us, Mr. Millet?"

"With much pleasure," he said.

"And I beg your pardon," she said, "for having misjudged you. I did think that you and my husband were in a plot together to set me against the house, and I did not think it was nice behavior in a

gentleman who was paying me his first visit. I told my husband as much last night before we went to sleep, and he stood up for you like the true friend he is; and now I am glad to say I have found out my mistake. I hope you will forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Bob, in the kindest and gentlest tone imaginable. "All that you have said and thought and done was most fair and reasonable, and I ought to be thankful for the little misunderstanding, if it has given you a better opinion of me."

CHAPTER VIII.

I TAKE BOB INTO MY CONFIDENCE.

"A SENSIBLE woman," said Bob, gazing after my wife; and then, in a more serious tone, "Ned, is it all true?"

"Every word of it."

"About the phantom of the girl?"

"Yes, about the phantom of the girl. Frightfully, horribly true!"

"You saw it?"

"I did; and I would swear it was no trick of imagination."

"And the door opened, as your wife has described?"

"It did, and I will swear that *that* was no trick of the imagination."

We had moved our chairs and were sitting by the open window, from which stretched the bright prospect of the flowers in my garden; there was a space of some three feet between our chairs as we sat facing each other, and on this space lay the skeleton cat.

"There is something more," I said. "Look down here." I pointed to the cat.

"Well? I am looking."

"What do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Nothing, except the carpet."

"Bob, would you judge me to be a man possessed of a fair amount of common sense?"

"Certainly."

"Not likely to give way to fads and fancies?"

"Certainly."

"Caring, as a rule, more for the prosaic than the romantic side of things?"

"I should say that, without doubt."

"And you would say what is true of me, up to the present moment. I prefer the plain bread-and-butter side of life, and though I hope I have a proper sympathy for my fellow-creatures, I am not given to extravagant sentiment. I am putting this description of myself in very plain words, because I really want you to understand me as I am."

"I think I do understand you, Ned."

"I have never had a nightmare," I continued, "and, as a rule, my sleep is dreamless. It is true that my rest has been a little disturbed lately by my wife's wish to move, but the few restless nights

I have passed from this reason are quite an exception. To sum myself up briefly and concisely, I claim to be considered a healthy human being in mind and body."

"It is not I, Ned, who would dispute that claim."

"I have told you that the spectral figure of the girl appeared to me A doctor would at once declare it to be a delusion of the senses. If my wife informed the doctor that she also saw it, he would reply that she also was suffering under a delusion, and he would attempt to explain it away on the ground of sympathy between us. But the opening of the door could be no delusion; it was tight shut, and the key was incontestibly turned in the lock; and yet it opened to admit the specter. The doctor would smile at this, and ask incredulously, 'Is it necessary for the entrance of an apparition, that a door should be open, when it possesses the power of passing through material obstacles?' It *does* possess such a power, Bob; I have tested and proved it. Now, what I have been coming to is this. My wife saw one apparition; I saw two."

"Two?" exclaimed Bob, regarding me more intently.

"Yes, two. One, the girl, vanished; the other, the cat, remained."

"In Heaven's name what are you talking about?"

"I am relating an absolute fact. By the side of the girl appeared the apparition of a skeleton cat, which accompanied me from the house, which glided along the streets at my side, which entered my own house with me, and which now lies here, on this little space of carpet between us, on which you see—nothing. Now, Bob, tell me at once that I am mad."

"I shall tell you nothing of the kind; I must have a little time to consider. What kind of reading do you indulge in? Sensation stories?"

"I chiefly read the newspapers."

"Digestion good, Ned?"

"In perfect condition; for the last ten years I have not had a day's bad health."

"All that is in your favor."

"Thank you. I see that you are taking a medical view of my case."

"Indeed, I am not; I only want to think it out for myself. You can actually see the cat?"

"There it lies, its yellow eyes fixed on my face."

"Touch it."

I stretched forth my hand and passed it over and through the apparition.

"Does it reply by any sign?"

"By none."

"And yet it moves?"

"When I move. Otherwise it remains motionless, in a state of expectation, as it appears to me."

"I don't quite understand, Ned."

"It is difficult to understand, but it seems to be waiting for something in the near or distant future. It relieves me to unburden my mind to you, Bob. I do not intend to confide in my wife; it would frighten her out of her life, and in the kindness of her heart she would try to make me disbelieve the evidence of my own senses. Therefore not a word about this to her. I hear her singing; she is coming back to us, and she is singing to make me cheerful. Why, Maria," I said, as she entered the room, "what have you got your hat on for? Are you going out for a walk?"

"I am," she replied briskly, "and you two gentlemen are coming with me. It is now half-past seven, and if you will be so good as not to raise any objection I propose to treat you to the theater."

"A good idea," said Bob Millet, in a tone as lively as her own.

"No tragedies," she continued, "a play that we can have a good laugh over; we have had enough of tragedies to-day, and I don't intend they shall get the best of me. We will go to the Criterion,

where you always get a proper return for your money, and I hope you won't object to the pit, Mr. Millet?"

"I assure you," said Bob, with grave humor, "that when I sit in the pit I shall consider myself one of the aristocracy. Your wife is a capital doctor, Ned."

Very willingly I fell in with the thoughtful proposition, and as Maria insisted upon paying all the expenses out of her private purse I allowed her to do so, knowing that it would give her pleasure.

We arrived at the Criterion before the raising of the curtain and we saw a laughable comedy most admirably acted, which afforded us great enjoyment. I may say that the circumstance of the skeleton cat not accompanying us was the mainspring of my enjoyment. Could it have been, after all, an illusion? Was it really possible that the apparitions I had seen were the creations of my fancy? Bob whispered to me once:

"Has it accompanied us?"

"No," I whispered back, "I see nothing of it."

When we were outside the theater, and were ready to depart our separate ways, Bob said:

"Will you come and spend an hour with me to-morrow evening, Ned?"

"Yes, he will," said my wife; "it will do him good. It does not do, Mr. Millet, for a man to mope too much at home."

So I consented, and we shook hands, and wished each other good-night.

CHAPTER IX.

I PAY BOB MILLET A VISIT.

I WAS naturally curious when I arrived home to see if the cat was there. It was. It did not meet me at the street door, but it lay on the spot on which I had left it a few hours previously. Of course this distressed me, but I did not betray my uneasiness to my wife. I had at least cause for thankfulness in the silent announcment made by the apparition that it was not its intention to accompany me to every place I visited.

We had our supper and went to bed; and it was an additional comfort to me when I found that it did not follow us to our bedroom.

It was not likely, after such an exciting day, that I should pass a good night. My rest was greatly disturbed; and at about three o'clock I was wide awake. My wife was sleeping soundly. I rose quietly, thrust my feet in my slippers, and went downstairs to the dining-room. There lay the cat with its eyes wide open.

"You infernal creature," I cried, holding the

candle so that its light fell upon the specter, "what are you here for? What do you want me to do? Why do you not go back to your grave and leave me in peace?"

I asked these questions slowly, and paused between each, with an insane notion that an answer might be given to them. No answer was vouchsafed, and I recognized the folly of my expectation. The peculiarity of the apparition was that its eyes never seemed to be closed, as the eyes of other cats are when they are in repose. It appeared to be ever on the watch, but what it was watching for was a sealed mystery to me. In a moment of exasperation I raised my hand against it threateningly; it did not move. I went no further than this, feeling that it would be cowardly to strike at a shadow. I returned to my bedroom, and after tossing about for an hour fell into a disturbed sleep.

Bob lived at Canonbury, and had given me directions to take a North London train, his station being about half a mile from his lodgings.

All the day the cat had remained in the dining-room, but when I was leaving the house on my visit to Bob, it rose and followed me.

"Do you intend to favor me with your company?" I asked. "Very well, come along."

And come along it did, to the train I took, got

into the carriage with me, and emerged from it at the Canonbury station, where I found Bob waiting for me on the platform.

"I have brought another visitor with me, Bob," I said, "but I can assure you it has accompanied me without any invitation."

"Is it here, then?" he asked, following the direction of my eyes.

"Yes, Bob, it is here." And as we walked to the old-fashioned house in which he rented one room at the top, I remarked, "Is it not singular that it did not come to the theater with me last night, and that it should accompany me now upon this friendly visit to you?" Bob nodded. "I am beginning to have theories about it," I continued, "and one is, that something will occur to-night in connection with the haunted house in Lamb's Terrace."

"Do not get too many fancies into your head, old fellow," said Bob.

"I will not get more than I can help, but ideas come without any active prompting or wish of my own; I am like a man who is being driven, or led."

Bob's one room was by no means uncomfortable; it served at once for his living and bedroom, but the bed he occupied being a folding bed, and the washstand he used being inclosed, it did not pre-

sent the appearance of a bedroom. There were shelves on the walls containing a large number of books; four or five of these were on the table.

"Now, sir or madam," said I to the cat, "what do you think of Bob's residence, and what can we do to make you comfortable?"

The cat glided to the hearthrug and stretched itself upon it; I wrested my attention from the unpleasant object.

"I am very well off here," said Bob; "the landlady cooks my meals for me, and allows me to have them downstairs. I am at the top of the house, and there is a fine view from the roof; I often smoke for an hour there. You see that door in the corner; it is a closet, with a fixed flight of steps leading to the roof; in case of fire I should be safe. Sit in the armchair, Ned, and let us reason out things. I have been thinking a great deal about you to-day, and talking about you, too."

"That was scarcely right, Bob."

"Don't be afraid; you were not mentioned by name, and the gentleman I conversed with is blind. That is the reason, very likely, why he believes in what he does not see."

"A friend of yours?"

"A dear friend; a poor gentleman who has suffered, and who bears his sufferings with a resigna-

tion which can only spring from faith. I told you yesterday that I had been married and that I lost my wife. The gentleman I speak of is the son of my dead wife's sister, who is herself a widow. My wife's family were gentlefolk, who had fallen from affluence, not exactly into poverty, but into very poor circumstances. Ronald Elsdale—the name of my nephew—is a tutor; he was not born blind; the affliction came upon him gradually, and was accelerated by over study in his boyish days. Four years ago he could see, and when blindness came upon him he was fortunately armed, and able to obtain a fair living for himself and his widowed mother by tutoring. He is an accomplished musician, and frequently obtains remunerative engagements to play. He speaks modern languages fluently, is well up in the sciences, has read deeply, and is altogether as noble and sweet a gentleman as moves upon the earth."

Bob spoke with enthusiasm, and it was easy to perceive that he had a sincere love for Mr. Ronald Elsdale.

"In every way so accomplished and admirable," I said, "and with such a misfortune hanging over him, he needs a wife to look after him."

"His mother does that," Bob replied, "with tender devotion, and Ronald will never marry unless—

but thereby hangs a tale, as Shakspere says. He is not the only man who cherishes delusions."

"Ah! he has delusions. I hope they are more agreeable than mine. How is it, Bob, that you have had time for so much talk to-day with your nephew?"

"This is Thursday, and Mr. Gascoigne closes his office on Thursdays at two o'clock, so I have had a few hours at my disposal, which have been partly employed in talking with Ronald and partly in studying your case."

"Explain."

"I have been looking up apparitions," said Bob, pointing to the books upon the table.

I did not trouble myself to examine them; it did not seem to me that the books would be of much service in my case; the facts themselves were sufficiently strong and stern, and I mentally scouted the idea that printed matter would enable me to get rid of the apparition that haunted me.

"It is clear to me," I said, "that you think I am laboring under some hallucination, and that I see the specter, now lying on the hearthrug, with my mental and not my actual vision. Very well, Bob; a difference of opinion will not alter the facts."

"The awkward part of it is," said Bob, "that all evidence is against you."

I nodded toward the books on the table, and said, "All such evidence as that."

"Yes, but you must not forget that cleverer heads than ours have occupied years of their lives in sifting these matters to the bottom."

"In trying to sift them, Bob."

"Well, in trying to sift them; but they give reasons for the conclusions they arrive at which it would be difficult, if not impossible, for men like ourselves to argue away."

"There are two strong witnesses on my side," I remarked; "one is myself, the other is my wife. Bear in mind that we both saw the apparition of the girl; there was no collusion between us beforehand, and if, in our fright, our imaginations were already prepared to conjure up a phantom of the air, it is hardly possible that that phantom should, without previous concert, assume exactly the same form and shape; nor was there any after conspiracy between us as to the manner in which this phantom was to be dressed. Now, my wife has described to me the dress of the girl, the shreds of a cap sticking to her hair, the frock of faded pink, the carpet slippers, the black stockings, and I recognize the faithfulness of these details, which presented themselves to me exactly as they did to her. Granted that one mind may be laboring under a delusion, it is

hardly possible that two minds can simultaneously be thus imposed upon. Answer that, Bob."

"Sympathy," he replied.

"The word I used yesterday evening, when I was imagining what the doctors would say upon my case; it is an easy way to get out of it, but it does not satisfy me. I suppose you have come across some curious cases in looking up apparitions?"

"Some very curious cases. Here is one in which a door, not only locked but bolted, plays a part. A great Scotch physician relates how a person of high rank complains to him that he is in the habit of being visited by a hideous old woman at six o'clock every evening; that she rushes upon him with a crutch in her hand, and strikes him a blow so severe that he falls down in a swoon. The gentleman informs the physician that on the previous evening, at a quarter to six o'clock, he carefully locked and double bolted the door of the room, and that then he sat down in his chair and waited. Exactly as the clock strikes six the door flies wide open—as the door in Lamb's Terrace did, Ned—and the old woman rushes in and deals him a harder blow than she was in the habit of doing, and down he falls insensible. 'How many times has this occurred?' asks the physician. 'Several times,' is the reply. 'On any one of these occasions,' says

the physician, 'have you had a companion with you?' 'No,' the gentleman replies, 'I have been quite alone.' The physician then inquires at what hour the gentleman dines, and he answers, five o'clock, and the physician proposes that they shall dine the next day in the room in which the old woman makes her appearance. The gentleman gladly consents; they dine together as agreed upon, and the physician—who is an agreeable talker—succeeds apparently in making his host forget all about the apparition. Suddenly, the clock on the mantelpiece is heard striking six. 'Here she is, here she is!' cries the gentleman, and a moment afterward falls down in a fit."

"Very curious," I said, "and how does the wise physician account for the delusion?"

"By the gentleman having a tendency to apoplexy."

"There is, generally," I observed, "a weak spot or two in this kind of story. Does it say in the account that the door was locked and bolted when the gentleman and the physician dined together, and that the door flew open upon the appearance of the old lady?"

"No, it does not say that."

"The omission of the precaution to lock the door," I said, "is fatal, for the absence of that visi-

ble and material manifestation deprives the physician of the one strong argument he could have brought forward. Had the door been locked and bolted, and had the old woman appeared without its flying open, the physician could have said to the gentleman, 'You see, the door remains fastened, as we fastened it before we sat down to dinner; you imagined that it flew open, and there it remains shut, a clear proof that the old woman and her crutch is but a fevered fancy.' That would have disposed of this gentleman at once."

"Quite so," said Bob.

"You will, I suppose, admit that if the locked door had opened in the physician's presence, it would have been a sign that some spiritual power had been exercised for which he could not so readily have accounted?"

"Yes, I should admit that."

"Admit, then, that as my wife and I—two witnesses, each uninfluenced by the other—saw the locked door in Lamb's Terrace fly open, that *that* is an evidence of the exercise of a spiritual power."

Bob laughed a little awkwardly. "You have made me give evidence against myself," he said.

Here there came a knock at the door, and Bob calling "Come in," the landlady of the house made her appearance.

"Mr. Elsdale is downstairs," she said, "and was coming up, when I told him you had a friend with you, and he sent me to ask whether he would be intruding."

Bob looked at me inquiringly.

"Not so far as I am concerned," I said; "I should very much like to make your nephew's acquaintance."

"Ask Mr. Elsdale to come up," said Bob; and the landlady departed.

"I have more than a passing fancy to see your nephew," I said; "you tell me he has delusions; what he says in our discussion, which I don't propose to drop when he joins us, may be of interest."

As I spoke Ronald Elsdale entered the room.

"My nephew, Ronald Elsdale," said Bob, introducing us. "My old friend, Mr. Emery."

As we shook hands my attention was diverted to an incident which, insignificant as it might appear, struck me as very singular; the skeleton cat had risen from the hearthrug and was now standing at Ronald Elsdale's feet, looking up into his face.

CHAPTER X.

RONALD ELSDALE GIVES OPINIONS.

SOMETHING more singular than this next attracted my attention. Ronald Elsdale, blind as he was, inclined his head to the ground and seemed to be returning the gaze of the cat. "Can it be possible," I thought, "that this man, physically blind, and this cat, invisible to all eyes but mine, are conscious of each other's presence?" I put this to the test.

"You appear to be listening for something," I said.

"Did you bring a dog with you?" he asked. "My uncle, I know, keeps neither cat nor dog."

"No," I replied, "I brought no dog."

"Then I must be mistaken," he said, and he felt his way to the seat he was in the habit of occupying in Bob's room. The cat lay at his feet.

I was prepossessed in the young man's favor the moment I set eyes upon him. He was tall and fair, a true Saxon in feature and complexion. There was an engaging frankness in his manner, and his bearing was that of a gentleman. He

aroused my curiosity by a habit he had of closing his eyes when any earnest subject occupied his mind. He closed them now as he sat upon his chair, and when he opened them he said, in a singularly gentle voice, "My uncle has told you I am blind, Mr. Emery?"

"Yes," I replied; "I sincerely sympathize with you."

"Thank you. It is a great misfortune; but there are compensations. There are always compensations, Mr. Emery, even for the worst that can happen to a man."

"It is good if one can think so," I remarked. "As a rule men are not patient when things are not as they wish."

"It is not only useless to repine," was his reply, "it is foolish, and morally weak. For, admitting that there is such a principle as divine justice, we must also admit a divine interposition even in the small matters of human life. I should not speak so freely if my uncle had not told me of his early association with you, and of the friendly and affectionate greeting he received from you after a separation of nearly forty years. I look upon you already as a friend."

"I am glad to hear you say so; we will seal the compact."

I pressed his hand once more, and he responded as I would have wished him to respond.

"I knew you would like each other," said Bob.

"When I closed my eyes just now," resumed Ronald Elsdale, "it was because of the impression I had that there was some other living creature in the room beside ourselves."

Bob and I exchanged glances, and Bob said:

"We three are the only living creatures within these four walls of mine."

"Of course, of course. Mr. Emery said so, and it is not likely he would deceive me. Blind people, Mr. Emery, are generally very suspicious; it follows naturally upon their affliction. Seeing nothing, they doubt much, and are ever in fear that they are being imposed upon and deceived. I am happy to say this is not the case with me; where I have not a fixed opinion I generally believe what is told me."

A pang of self-reproach shot through me as he spoke. Here was I, in my very first interview with this frank and ingenuous young gentleman, deliberately deceiving him. Bob, also, did not seem quite at his ease. He was playing with his lower lip, always an indication in him of mental disturbance.

"You said something just now," I observed, with a wish to change the subject, "about compensations

for misfortune, and I infer that you have compensations for yours. But it must cause you regret?"

"It does, but I do not fret, I do not take it to heart; I accept the inevitable. The proper use of the higher intelligence with which we are gifted is to reason calmly upon all human and worldly matters which touch us nearly. Those who can thus reason have cause for gratitude; and I have cause. Compensations? Yes, I have them. Difficult to describe, perhaps, because they are spiritual; inspired by faith or self-delusion, which stern materialists declare are one and the same thing."

"Your uncle and I," I said, "were having a discussion upon delusions when you entered."

"In continuation"—he turned to Bob; he seemed to know always where the person he was addressing was standing or sitting—"in continuation of the discussion we were having this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Bob, "and we do not quite agree."

"My uncle is a skeptic," said Ronald, "he does not believe in miracles."

"You do?" I inquired.

"Undoubtedly. It will be a fatal day for the world when faith in miracles is dead. Do not do my uncle an injustice, Mr. Emery; I never heard him speak as he spoke this afternoon when we were discussing this subject, and it almost seemed to me

as if he were desirous of arguing against himself. Do *you* require absolute visible proof before you believe?"

"Not always," I replied, with my eyes on the spectral cat. "I am forced to believe in some things which are not visible to other eyes than mine."

"I do not quite understand you," said Ronald thoughtfully. "It is, at the best, but a half-hearted admission, and, regarding you in the light of a friend, as I do Uncle Bob, I would like to break down the barrier."

"Try," I said anxiously.

He was silent for a moment or two, considering.

"My uncle, this afternoon, in the attempt to support his argument, brought forward some instances of spectral illusions such as that of a man who was in the habit of seeing in his drawing room a band of figures, dressed in green, who entertained him with singular dances; and he instanced other illusions of a like nature. These are waking fancies, produced either by a disordered mind or a disordered body; they are of the same order as dreams.

> At dead of night imperial Reason sleeps,
> And Fancy, with her train, her revel keeps.

So by day, when the mind is disturbed by such fancies, does imperial reason sleep. For my own part

I make no attempt to dispute the facts of these cases. They have been brought forward by physicians in proof of certain functional and scientific facts, and by wise treatment suffering mortals have been won from madness. In this respect they have served a good purpose; but materialists, and persons who now fashionably call themselves agnostics, seize upon these illustrations in proof that mortal life is of no more value, and means no more, than the life of a flower or the growth of a stone, and that when we die we are blotted out spiritually and materially forever. In their eyes we are so many pounds of flesh and blood; there is nothing divine, nothing spiritual in us; we are surrounded by no mystery. 'Miracles!' they cry. 'Stories for children; fables to tickle, amuse, and delude!' What we see and feel is, what we do not see and feel is not and cannot be. If this view were universal what would become of religion? The high priests of God, under whichever banner they preach, insist upon our accepting miracles, and they are right in thus insisting. You laugh at faith and destroy it, and in its destruction you destroy comfort and consolation; you destroy salvation. God is a miracle. Because we do not see him are we not to believe in him? Are we not to believe in the resurrection? Then farewell to the sublime solace that lies in the immor-

tality of the soul. There is a road to Calvary called the Via Dolorosa, and there pilgrims kneel and see a miracle in every stone; there, hearts that are crushed with sorrow tarry, and go away blessed and comforted for the struggle of years that yet lies before them."

His voice was deep and earnest, his handsome face glowed with enthusiasm. I touched his hand, and a sweet, pathetic smile came to his lips.

"Mr. Elsdale," I said, "I thank you from my heart. May I venture to ask if you believe in spiritual visitations?"

"Believing what I believe," he replied, "I must believe in them."

"You have spoken," I continued, "of receiving comfort and consolation from such belief. Do you think that a man who is not, to his own knowledge, interested or involved in something which, for the sake of argument, I will call a crime, may receive a spiritual visitation which compels him to take an active part in it?"

"Not in the crime," asked Ronald, "in the discovery of it, I suppose you mean?"

"Yes. In the discovery of it."

"I think," said Ronald, "that a man who is not in any way connected with it may be made an agent in its discovery."

We had some further conversation on the subject, and at the expiration of an hour or so Ronald Elsdale took his departure, and expressed the hope that we should meet again, to which hope I cordially responded.

As he stood with his hand on the handle of the door, the cat, which had risen when he rose, stood at his feet.

"Are you going with him?" I mentally asked. "You are quite welcome."

A troubled expression crossed Ronald's face, and he made a motion with his hand as if to dispel it. Then he left the room, but the cat remained.

CHAPTER XI.

BOB RELATES TO ME SOME PARTICULARS OF RONALD ELSDALE'S DELUSION.

I LISTENED to the blind gentleman's footsteps as he slowly descended the stairs, and I asked Bob if he considered it safe to allow his nephew to go home unaccompanied.

"Quite safe," replied Bob. "When a man loses the sense of sight he acquires other senses which have not been precisely defined; he seems to have eyes at his fingers' ends. And Ronald prefers to be alone."

"Can you account," I inquired, approaching a subject which I knew was in Bob's mind, and to which he was unwilling to be the first to refer, "for his impression that there was another presence in the room beside ourselves?"

"I cannot," said Bob curtly; "nor can you."

"I do not pretend that I can; but it has set me thinking. Would you object to let me into the secret of the delusion under which he labors?"

"There can be no harm in my doing so," he

replied, after a pause. "In a certain way it is a love story, of which I believe Ronald has seen the end, a belief which is not shared by him. The incidents are few, and he sets store upon them, as most young men do who have been in love. It commenced about six years ago, when Ronald, fagged with overwork, went for a summer ramble on the Continent. He spent a few days in Paris, and then took the morning train to Geneva. It is a long travel from Paris to Geneva, and to anyone not cheerfully inclined a wearisome one. A happy spirit is required to enjoy a dozen hours boxed up in a railway carriage, but probably this day was to Ronald the happiest, as it was certainly the most eventful, in his life. For traveling in that train were a young lady and her father, a widower, I believe, though upon this point I cannot speak with certainty, nor can I tell you the gentleman's name, for the reason that Ronald has never mentioned it to me. The lady's was Beatrice, and that is all I know. In the course of that eventful day Ronald found opportunity to make himself of service to the young lady, but his attentions did not appear to be as agreeable to the father as they were to the daughter. It could not be doubted that she accepted them very readily, and that Ronald was as attractive to her as she was to him. From what I

have gathered I should say that it was a case of love at first sight on both sides. Ronald, as you have seen, is a handsome young fellow, who would be likely to win favor with ladies all the world over, and at the time I am speaking of he was not oppressed by the fear of losing his sight.

"When they were within a short distance of Geneva he asked Beatrice at which hotel they were going to put up, and she replied that she did not know. He inquired of her father, and that gentleman said he had not made up his mind.

"'I hope we shall meet again,' said Ronald to Beatrice. 'Where do you go from Geneva?'

"'To Chamounix, of course,' she replied. 'I have never been in Switzerland before. Have you?'

"'Oh, yes,' he said. And then he described to her some of the most beautiful spots in Switzerland, and you may be sure that those beautiful spots were the places he intended to visit, and for which he had taken a circular ticket.

"'Perhaps I shall see you in Chamounix,' he said. 'Do you remain long in Geneva?'

"She could not inform him, and he had perforce to live on hope; for, to a fishing inquiry he put to Beatrice's father as to their probable length of stay in Geneva, the reply he received was that no defin-

ite plan of travel had been laid out. They might remain in Geneva a week or a fortnight, or they might leave it the next day. Even at this early stage of his acquaintanceship with Beatrice, Ronald discovered that her father did not wish to be intruded upon by strangers. It was dark when the train stopped at the Geneva station, and all Ronald's offers of assistance with the luggage were refused. However, he had the satisfaction, when he shook hands with Beatrice and wished her good-night, of receiving from her something more than a careless pressure, and he marched to his hotel with the determination not to lose sight of her.

"It was his intention to go to Cluses by rail, and thence by diligence to Chamounix. 'They will take a carriage, of course,' he thought, 'but we shall travel on the same day and arrive in Chamounix the same evening.'

"I have no doubt that he dreamt of Beatrice that night, and that, in his fancy, he saw her fair face in the depths of the beautiful lake the next morning. But that is all he saw of her in Geneva, for though he made diligent search and most industrious inquiries he could not discover the hotel at which Beatrice and her father were staying.

"I know," continued Bob, "that you have formed a favorable opinion of Ronald, but still you can

have no idea of the stability of his character and of certain traits in it which distinguish him from most men. Once let an idea take firm possession of him and it is next to impossible to dislodge it. He dwells upon it, strengthens it by self-argument, and begets a strong faith in it. He is not easily discouraged and he seldom gives way to despair; he is, in a word, extraordinarily tenacious, and he was tenacious in this, the first serious love affair in his life. As he has expressed it to me, he felt that fate had brought him and Beatrice together, and that fate would not separate them. These are comfortable convictions; they rob life of many small miseries. Thus strengthened and fortified, Ronald continued his search for Beatrice in Geneva, and was not dashed because of the non-success that attended it. On the third day he determined to go on to Chamounix, and if they were not there to wait for their arrival. In so small a village as Chamounix Beatrice's father could scarcely hope to conceal his daughter from Ronald's eyes. On he went, and discovered that he was before them. There is but one road from Cluses to Chamounix, and from three to six o'clock on the afternoon of every successive day there was no more indefatigable pedestrian on that road than Ronald Elsdale. At length his patience was rewarded. An hour

before the diligence was due he saw on the road which crosses the Arve a carriage, in which were seated Beatrice and her father. He did not wish to be seen by them so early on their arrival and he stepped out briskly before them to the Chamounix village. Their carriage drew up at the Hotel d'Angleterre and in the course of half an hour they left the hotel for a stroll. The moment they were out of sight he entered and engaged a room, and maneuvered to have his seat at the dinner table placed next to theirs. They were greatly surprised to see him, and I need scarcely say that of the two Beatrice was by far the better pleased. Such chance meetings, however, as these between tourists on the Continent are common enough, and, as Ronald is unmistakably a gentleman, Beatrice's father could not but receive him politely. In the course of conversation over the dinner table Beatrice informed Ronald that they intended to remain in Chamounix for at least a week.

"'We are not quite sure,' said Beatrice's father quickly.

"'Oh, yes, we are,' said Beatrice. 'It was a binding promise.'

"He made a grimace, but did not reply.

"I mention these small matters," said Bob, breaking off here, "so that you may rightly understand

the attitude adopted by the elder gentleman toward my nephew, and it certainly seems to be not open to doubt that he did not regard Ronald with a favorable eye.

"In the course of that week at Chamounix some understanding must have been arrived at by the young people which caused them to consider themselves engaged, but I believe there was nothing absolutely definite between them at the time. Beatrice and her father left Chamounix for Lucerne, and Ronald followed; but he was as unsuccessful in his endeavors to find them in Lucerne as he had been in Geneva. He went from place to place in the hope of meeting them, and it was not until a fortnight had elapsed that he had the happiness of tracking them to Como. To make short of a long story, Beatrice's father could no longer affect ignorance of the feelings which existed between Ronald and Beatrice, and in a conversation with Ronald he expressed open disapproval of my nephew's attentions. The only effect this opposition had upon Ronald was to deepen his love for Beatrice, and it appeared to be the same with the young lady. In one of the interviews between the gentlemen, Beatrice's father did not hesitate to declare that Ronald was following his daughter for her money, which Ronald indignantly denied, the

truth being that he had no idea that Beatrice was in any way an heiress; and, except that she was a lady, and her father a gentleman, he was entirely ignorant of their social position.

"From this point of Ronald's story, what I have to relate must be conveyed in more general terms. I gather that when the tour was ended the young people met occasionally and corresponded; and also that every obstacle that he could devise was placed in their way by Beatrice's father. Thus passed twelve months or so, at the end of which time the young lady mysteriously disappeared; and all Ronald's efforts to trace her were of no avail. It was in the midst of this trouble that his sight began to fail him, and then it was that he was assailed by the doubt whether, threatened with blindness, he had any right to marry. Had it not been for this impending visitation he had sufficient confidence in his prospects to warrant him in setting up a home to which he could bring a wife. But now all was changed, and the best he could hope for was that his exertions would enable him to support himself and his mother in fair comfort. If he had known how to communicate with Beatrice he would have explained this frankly to her, but he did not know where to address her; and consequently Beatrice's father was thus far master of the

situation. As you have seen, Ronald was not spared the affliction; the most experienced specialists could do nothing for him; he finally lost his sight, and I am afraid there is no hope of his regaining it.

"Misfortunes never come singly, and they did not come singly to Ronald. About a year after blindness fell upon him he heard that Beatrice was dead, and that before her death she had been for some time in London. If her love for him had been lasting and sincere it was strange that, being in London, she had made no effort to see him and had not even written to him. There would have been no difficulty in her doing one or the other, because she was acquainted with his address; and here comes in one of his delusions. Notwithstanding her silence he believes that she was faithful to him. Upon this you may reasonably ask, 'Why, then, did he himself not endeavor to meet her—why did he discontinue his efforts to ascertain where she was living?' His answer is that he could not offer her a home, that he dared not ask her to share his lot, and that it was his duty to set her free entirely. There is a lack of logic in the method of his reasoning. By his own action he wishes her to believe herself in no way bound to him, and at the same time he believes that she is faithful to the vows they

exchanged. Lovers are seldom logical, and my nephew is no exception to the rule.

"But this is a trifling delusion in comparison with one I am now about to mention.

"Beatrice did not die a natural death. Retiring to rest one night, apparently in good health, she was found dead in her bed the next morning. Bear in mind that I do not vouch for the exact correctness of the particulars I am giving you. Ronald has always been exceedingly reticent upon the subject, and it is only from chance observations that have fallen from him that I have gathered and put together what I am now relating. She met her death by asphyxiation. Putting out the gas before getting into bed she must have accidentally turned it on again, for her room was filled with its fumes. In the face of all this, what will you think of my nephew when I tell you that he is under the delusion that Beatrice still lives?"

With the spectral cat in full view of me, I replied:

"Seeing what I see, I cast no doubt upon any man's delusions. It is warm here, Bob, let us go on the roof; perhaps this lady here would like a mouthful of fresh air."

CHAPTER XII.

A HOUSE ON FIRE.

BOB'S phantom visitor and my faithful companion had no objection to the tiles, in which it may have found an endearing memory of old associations. Bob had fixed a couple of seats to the roof, where we sat and chatted and smoked, and enjoyed the usual prospect of chimney pots and attic windows. Sitting upon that height, accompanied by the spectral cat, reminded me in an odd way of one of Cruikshank's pictures, and I made an observation to this effect to Bob.

"It *is* rather weird," he said, "and especially in this light."

The sun had set, and in the skies we saw the reflection of the yellow glare from the shops of crowded neighborhoods. Our conversation was confined within narrow limits because of the one engrossing subject which occupied my mind, and as we had pretty well threshed that out, and there was nothing particularly new to say about it, we fell into occasional silences, which suited the mood I was in. During one of these silences I observed

what appeared to be an unusual restlessness in the cat. Instead of sitting quietly at my feet it crept backward and forward, and at length paused at a little distance from me, with its face to the west. I described these movements to Bob, and remarked that it seemed to be expecting something."

"I wish with all my heart," was his reply, "that we could find some other subject to talk about than this wretched creature."

"I wish so, too; but I don't see how it is possible till it bids me farewell. I no longer possess a will of my own, but am led or driven as if I were a machine."

"Keep cool, Ned. I am not going to argue with you any more about the spiritual existence of your apparition. I accept it, and almost wish that it were as plain to my eyes as it is to yours. But what I want you to do, old fellow, while this visitation is upon you, is to keep cool. For less cause than you have, men have gone mad. That is an unusual glare in the sky; it can hardly be the reflection of gaslights."

He extended his hand to the west—the direction in which the spectral cat was looking.

"Do you see any connection," I asked, "between that glare and the attention which the apparition is bestowing upon it?"

"No," replied Bob.

"I do. That is the reflection of a house on fire."

As the words passed my lips the cat glided up to me, and I could almost have deluded myself into the belief that it plucked at my trousers. This, of course, from so unsubstantial and impalpable a figure could not have been; but it is certain that by its motion it made me understand that I must not remain idle on the roof of Bob's house—that there was a fire in the distance, and that I must go to it.

I obeyed the voiceless command.

"Come!" I said to Bob.

"Where to?"

"To the fire, in which my spectral friend is taking the greatest possible interest."

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "It must be a long way off."

"We shall find it. Come!"

There was no excitement in the immediate neighborhood as we walked along in the direction of the fire, being guided by the glare in the sky. A few persons turned their eyes upward, and, remarking that there was a fire somewhere, passed on. Their indifference arose from the circumstance that they were in no danger; I could not help reflecting upon the selfishness of human nature which causes men to look unmoved upon tragedies in which they

themselves are not involved. Being anxious to reach the spot quickly I called a cab, which in half an hour conveyed us to the corner of Stanmore Street, West. This was as far as the driver could go, the street being deluged with water, and blocked with fire engines and firemen. It had been a serious conflagration while it lasted, but the efforts made by the brigade to confine it to the house in which it broke out were successful. This one building, however, was completely gutted, even in that short space of time, and the enthralling incident in connection with it which was upon every man's tongue was that a gentleman had perished in the flames. From the remarks that reached my ears I gathered that the house had been let out as chambers, and that when the fire arose there were no other persons in it except the housekeeper and the gentleman who lived on the first floor. The housekeeper was saved; the gentleman was burned to death.

As I stood pondering, Bob at my side, the spectral figure of the cat at my feet, Bob asked, "Well, Ned, where's the connection?"

"Wait," I replied, rather irritably.

A woman, supported by two female friends, passed us. She was crying, and wringing her hands, and I learned that she was the housekeeper

who had been saved. Instinctively I followed her, and my visible and invisible companions accompanied me. It was not a difficult matter to elicit from the housekeeper all the information it was in her power to impart. The gentleman who had met with so untimely an end was a single man, with few friends and no relations.

"I don't think," said the housekeeper, "that he had a brother, or a sister, or a cousin in the world; leastways, so far as I know, no one ever came to see him who had any claim upon him. He was a quiet gentleman, and didn't give no trouble. What do you want to know, sir? Was he very rich? All I can say is he always paid his way, and always seemed to have plenty and to spare. His name? Mr. Alfred Warner, sir. Are you a friend of his?"

"No," I replied—for it was I who had asked the questions to which she had replied—"I was not acquainted with him."

"What name did she say?" asked Bob, in a whisper.

"Mr. Alfred Warner," I said.

Bob caught his breath, and said, "That's strange! It is the name of the gentleman who put into our hands No. 79 Lamb's Terrace."

"There is the connection, Bob," I said. "What

do you say. now to the spectral cat and its having urged us to come to this fire?"

"What can I say, except that it is most bewildering and mysterious?"

"Do you think I am still laboring under a delusion?"

"No, I do not."

"It was not without a motive," I said, "that I asked your nephew this evening whether he believed that a man who is not interested in something which, to make myself fairly clear, I called a crime, might receive a spiritual visitation which compelled him to take an active part in its discovery. His reply was that he did believe such a thing could be. I believe it, too, more than ever now, after this strange fire; and I believe, also, that there is a crime involved in it, and that I—whether by design or accident I will not pretend to say—shall be instrumental in its discovery. My memory does not deceive me, does it, Bob? You told me yesterday that the gentleman who has met his death in that fire, Mr. Alfred Warner, when he placed 79 Lamb's Terrace in your employer's hands to let, did not mention the name of his last tenant."

"Yes, I told you so," Bob answered, "and there seemed to be no reason why we should ask for it."

"So that it is probable," I continued, "that there is not a disinterested person in London to whom we could go to obtain the name of the last tenant."

"Not that I am aware of," said Bob.

I looked at my watch. It was ten o'clock. "If we went to your nephew's house, do you think we should find him up?"

"Very likely."

"I am going there, Bob. I have a question to ask him."

He put no opposition in my way. A kind of stupefaction appeared to have come over him. We drove to the residence of Ronald Elsdale, and found him up; his mother had gone to bed. As we entered his room, I observed again an uneasy expression flash into his face, and I saw his blind eyes turn toward the spectral cat.

"Only yourselves?" he inquired.

I left it to Bob to reply, and he said, "Only ourselves."

"It is very odd," said Ronald, "but I have the same impression that I had when I entered my uncle's room this evening, that there is somebody or something else present. It is useless trying to account for it." Then he asked, "Is there anything you wish to know?"

"It is a late hour to visit you," I said; "but I

have a reason, which I cannot at present explain, for asking you where the young lady to whom you were attached lived when she was in London?"

He turned his troubled face toward his uncle, who said, "It is not an idle question, Ronald. I should like you to answer it."

"She may not have lived there all the time she was in London," said Ronald; "but I heard where it is supposed she met her death. It was in the Northwestern district—Lamb's Terrace, No. 79."

"Thank you," I said.

We wished him good-night, and left the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

I TAKE THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

I WAS too much excited to go home by train, though I knew that my wife would be waiting up for me. I felt the need of physical motion; the idea of sitting down in a railway carriage, and being compelled to keep still because of the people with which at this time of night it was sure to be filled, was unendurable. The confinement and the close air would stifle me. The advantage of walking through streets more or less crowded is that you can be alone if you choose. Every person you meet or pass is so wrapt up in his own affairs that no notice is taken of you. You may wave your arms, flourish your stick or umbrella, mutter to yourself, even talk aloud, without attracting conspicuous attention. An idle fellow or two might think you eccentric—that is all. In a railway carriage or an omnibus such license and freedom are impossible; you cannot shift your seat without drawing all eyes upon you, in a certain sense you become the property of other passengers, who would

be likely to regard you with alarmed suspicion, and would probably conclude that you were an escaped lunatic. In such circumstances you are deprived of the power of devoting yourself to the one absorbing subject which occupies your mind.

"I shall walk home," I said to Bob.

He nodded, as though he understood why at so late an hour I deliberately inflicted upon myself a good four mile tramp. For a quarter of that distance we proceeded in silence, and only then did it occur to me that Bob was coming out of his way. I made an observation to this effect.

"If you don't object to my company," he said, "I shall be glad to walk with you."

"What do you think of it all?" I asked.

"I don't know what to think," was his reply.

"No delusion, eh, Bob?" I said, in a tone of sarcastic triumph. "You will not hunt up any more cases of spectral illusions to prove that I am on the road to madness."

"No, Ned. Don't harp upon my lack of faith; the doubts I entertained were reasonable doubts after all. It is altogether a most awful mystery, but I accept it, and place myself at your service. Heaven only knows if I can be of any assistance to you, but it may be that even the renewal of our old friendship, and our coming together after a separa-

tion of forty years, are not due to chance. If so, I stand within the charmed circle."

"It was not by chance we met, Bob; in the smallest incident that has occurred in connection with that house—which I can see now with my mind's eye, dark, silent, spirit-haunted—I perceive the hand of fate. You *can* be of service to me."

"In what way?"

"I wish to take the house in Lamb's Terrace."

A startled exclamation escaped his lips, but he said immediately afterward, as if in apology, "Yes, Ned, yes."

"I should say, rather, that I wish to have the refusal for a certain time of taking it for a term of years. This can be managed, I think, through you, and the death of your client may make it easier than it would otherwise have been. Say to your employer that I have not made up my mind whether it will suit me, and that I want a few weeks for consideration. Pending my decision, I will pay three months' rent, and at the expiration of that period, if I do not then take it for a term of years, it will be open to another tenant. I have no doubt that Mr. Gascoigne has some sort of provisional power in the matter, and that he will be glad of the chance there is in my offer of securing a per-

manent and responsible tenant. Will you undertake to carry this through?"

"Yes."

"Then you may as well walk all the way home with me, and I will write a check to-night, which you can give to Mr. Gascoigne in the morning. There is another thing which I must seriously consider. On the two occasions to-day when we and your nephew, and this specter of Fate gliding at my heels, were together, he was troubled by the fancy that I had brought some creature with me of which we made no mention. Is this new to you, or has your nephew expressed himself to a like effect on other occasions?"

"It is quíte new to me. Ronald has never had such a fancy before."

"The natural conclusion, therefore, is that he was conscious of the presence of this apparition, without being able to define its nature. There is here a chain of psychological circumstances which would not be admissible in a court of law, but which I, with my strange experiences, cannot but believe to be of supreme importance. I have an odd impression upon me that the mysterious adventure in which I am engaged has lasted for some considerable time, whereas scarcely two days have elapsed since my introduction to beings of another world.

I seem to be familiarized with mysterious incident, and I am so prepared that I doubt if anything would astonish me. Reflect, Bob, upon the links of a chain which is dragging me on, and which is not yet completely formed. Fate directs my steps, through the agency of my wife, to the office of Mr. Gascoigne; link number one. You, my old schoolfellow, whom I never thought to meet again, are employed in that office; link number two. My wife, against my wish, insists upon looking at a house to let in Lamb's Terrace, which I am certain will not suit us; link number three. These three links, to perfectly disinterested observers, would appear to be the result of the merest chance. We know that it is not so; we know that there is here at work a supernatural agency, every step in which is directed by an unseen power. You renew your old friendship with me, and accompany us home, and there you attempt to dissuade us from having anything to do with the house in Lamb's Terrace. Your kindly efforts are thrown away; link number four. You may ask me here how this seemingly trivial incident can be made into a link. My answer is that you are the uncle of Ronald Elsdale, and that when we left Mr. Gascoigne's office, had you not followed us and accepted my invitation to accompany us home, the natural probability is that

I should not at the present moment have known of the existence of your nephew, who stands now a foremost stone in this monument of mystery. My wife and I visit the haunted house, and there we behold two apparitions, only one of which makes itself visible to her. I perceive two reasons for this. The first is, that she shall be so horrified by what she sees as to give up all idea of taking the house, and perhaps of ever going near it again. The second is, that I am the person appointed to carry this dark mystery to its as yet unknown end. The apparition of the girl and the cat form link number five. I visit your house this evening, and make the acquaintance of Ronald Elsdale; link number six. On this occasion, and on the occasion of my seeing him again in his own house an hour ago, he has a troubled consciousness of a spiritual presence—the presence of the specter now gliding at our feet; link number seven. The eighth link is fashioned from the circumstance that the young lady whom Ronald Elsdale loved and loves is said to have met her death in the house in Lamb's Terrace."

"You have reasoned all this out," said Bob, "in a most wonderful way."

"It is not I who reason it out. I am conscious of the extent of my own natural powers, and it

would be impossible for me to bring forward these links and to logically connect them were I not spiritually directed. What is occupying my mind just now is the question whether I ought to take Ronald Elsdale into my confidence without waiting for further developments?"

Bob's reply was very humble. "Whatever you decide upon, Ned, will be right. The fatalist never doubts that the least incident in his life could have been otherwise than it is."

"Truly," I said, "I am in the position of a fatalist, and once a step is decided upon I shall not hesitate to take it, and shall not question its wisdom. By to-morrow morning the question will be answered for me."

My wife opened the street door for us.

"Why, who would have thought of seeing you, Mr. Millet!" she exclaimed. "But come in, come in; there's a bit of supper for you. Now, you two keeping together at this time of night shows what friends you must have been when you were boys. I hope you've had a pleasant evening."

"Rather an exciting one," I said. "We have been at a fire."

"A fire! Where?"

"In Stanmore Street; a long way from here."

"No one hurt, I hope?"

"An unfortunate gentleman lost his life in the fire. It is rather curious, Maria, that this gentleman should have been the owner of the house we looked over in Lamb's Terrace yesterday."

The news made her grave. "There is nothing but trouble connected with that dreadful place," she said. "But there, I don't want to think of it. I'd have given a good deal never to have set foot in it."

Before Bob left I wrote out the check for Mr. Gascoigne, and when I went to bed I was kept awake for a long time by thinking whether I ought to take Ronald Elsdale immediately into my confidence. I fell asleep with this question in my mind, and when I awoke in the morning I decided that it would be first advisable that I should ascertain some particulars of the last tenant, and of the death of the young lady, Beatrice. It was not an easy task I now set myself, and I felt that there was little chance of success, if I attempted it unaided. Desultory inquiries could lead to no satisfactory result, and I therefore determined to enlist the services of a private inquiry agent. Casting my mind over the most likely person to assist me, I recollected that a friend some years ago had need of the services of such a person, and had employed one Mr. Dickson, with good effect. Looking

through the columns of a morning paper I saw Mr. Dickson's advertisement; and at eleven o'clock I set out for his office, which was situated in Arundel Street, Strand. On my doorstep I confronted a telegraph boy with a telegram for me. It was from Bob, and it ran as follows:

Arranged house, Lamb's Terrace; yours for three months.

My interview with Mr. Dickson was soon over. I explained to him what I wanted done, and he undertook the commission for a specified sum. It was arranged that he should give me his report in writing, and he promised to set about the inquiry without delay.

"Will it lead to anything further?" he asked.

"It is quite probable," I replied; "but at present this is all I require of you."

Two days afterward I received his report.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MEAGER REPORT FROM THE INQUIRY AGENT.

"SIR: From inquiries I have made I am enabled to give you certain information respecting the matter you placed in my hands.

"The uncompleted term of the lease of the house, 79 Lamb's Terrace, was transferred, about nine years ago (not six or seven as you gave me to understand), to a gentleman of the name of Nisbet. At the time that this transfer was made the principal landlord was abroad—I believe in Australia—and his business affairs were in the hands of a firm of solicitors whose address I have not taken the trouble to ascertain, as it does not come within the limit of my instructions. Any information you wish upon this, or any other points which you did not mention in our interview, I shall be happy to obtain for you.

"Mr. Nisbet's family, at the time he entered into possession of 79 Lamb's Terrace consisted of himself and his stepdaughter Beatrice—he being her mother's second husband. Beatrice's mother died

four months after her marriage with Mr. Nisbet, and by her will she left the bulk of her fortune to her daughter, and only a small portion of it to her husband. He was appointed guardian to Beatrice, and in the event of her death her fortune was to revert to him.

"Should you desire to become acquainted with the precise terms and phraseology of the will, you can do so at Somerset House.

"The young lady inherited £60,000 invested in consols. From the interest of this sum Mr. Nisbet was to receive £1000 a year for his guardianship of his stepdaughter; and £200 per annum was apportioned to the young lady for pin money. The remaining portion of the interest was to accumulate until the young lady was twenty-one years of age, when she was to come into possession of it and the original capital. I have glanced through the will, and it appears to be carefully and sensibly worded, and devoid of complications.

"According to my information, Mr. Nisbet was deeply affected by the death of his wife, and he sought consolation in foreign travel. The consequence was that he and his stepdaughter spent much of their time abroad, and the house in Lamb's Terrace was occupied but a few weeks every year. About four years ago they returned to

London, with the intention, as I learn, of remaining here some time.

"Their domestic affairs, however, do not appear to have gone on smoothly; they had difficulties with servants, and after a while were left with only one, a young woman who, I should judge, was willing to make herself generally useful, and was rather more amiable than the majority of her class; otherwise she would not have remained. Keeping house under such circumstances presented few attractions, and they were contemplating taking up their permanent residence on the Continent when a calamity occurred which frustrated this intention and broke up the establishment.

"The young lady, going to bed, turned off the gas in her room, as she supposed, and went to sleep.

"Certain conjectures must be taken into account. If she had turned out the light and taken away her hand at once, there would have been no escape of gas. Whether, after the light was out, she carelessly or willfully turned on the tap again, or whether she got up in the night and did so, cannot be proved at this distance of time, because there was no witness of the incident with the exception of herself. Next morning she was found dead in her bed, having been suffocated by the fumes of the escaped gas.

"There was an inquest, and the evidence given of the cause of death was accepted as conclusive. Mr. Nisbet shut up the house in Lamb's Terrace, and left England. Having no instructions to ascertain where he is at the present time, I have made no inquiries.

"By the terms of his wife's will he came into possession of his stepdaughter's fortune.

"I inclose a newspaper, containing an account of the inquest, and I shall be happy to prosecute the inquiry in any further direction you desire.

"Yours obediently,

"JAMES DICKSON."

Although this report was not so full as I expected it to be, I had no cause of complaint against Mr. Dickson. He had kept strictly within the limit of his instructions, which he had taken down in writing from my lips, and he had lost no time; I had, therefore, reason to be satisfied with him. I turned my attention to the account of the inquest.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE INQUEST REVEALED.

"AN inquest was held yesterday at the Hare and Hounds on the body of Beatrice Lockyer, a young lady residing with her stepfather at 79 Lamb's Terrace, who met her death by suffocation. The coroner said this was a sad case, the deceased being young and apparently in good health on the night of the occurrence. The facts appeared to be very simple, and the jury would have little difficulty in arriving at a verdict. The first witness called was Mr. Nisbet, the deceased's stepfather, who gave his evidence with manifest distress.

"'What is your name?'

"'Oliver Nisbet.'

"'Profession?'

"'None. I live on my means.'

"'What relation do you bear to the deceased?'

"'She was my stepdaughter.'

"'Her age?'

"'Twenty last birthday.'

"'Is her mother living?'

"'No, she died four years ago.'

"'How long were you married?'

"'A few months only.'

"'At the time of her mother's death the deceased was sixteen years old?'

"'Yes.'

"'Did her death affect the deceased in any particular way?'

"'She was deeply grieved at the loss, but apart from this natural feeling there was no change in her.'

"'Have you observed any change in her during the last few days or weeks?'

"'No; we had had domestic worries with servants, such as happen to most housekeepers in London, but they had passed away, and as we had determined to reside abroad we regarded them rather with amusement. We looked forward to an easier life in a foreign country.'

"'On the night of your stepdaughter's death, at what hour did she retire to her room?'

"'At a little after ten.'

"'Who was in the house besides yourselves?'

"'No one.'

"'You had a servant left. What became of her?'

"'It was arranged that she should remain in our service on the Continent, and we sent her on before us.'

"'Where to?'

"'To Lucerne. I had taken a châlet in Vitznau, and she was to proceed there to see to the rooms, and to await our arrival.'

"'How is it that you and the deceased remained in the house when there were no servants in it?'

"'It was against my desire. I wished my daughter to go to a hotel, but she refused. She said we could manage very well at home. She had an aversion to English hotels, and was never happy in one. As we were to leave London the next day, I humored her.'

"'Can you give us any explanation of the cause of her aversion to our hotels?'

"'She was in the habit of saying that they were so different to Continental hotels—so stiff and formal. But I do not think that was quite the reason. She was nervously distrustful of herself in the society of strangers, and was, I regret to say, of a melancholy disposition.'

"'Had this been always the case with her?'

"'From her childhood, her mother used to tell me. For years past I have endeavored to bring her to a more cheerful frame of mind by travel and constant change of scene, but I fear my efforts were wasted.'

"'Was her mother of a similar disposition?'

"'Yes. It is a natural inference that it was inherited.'

"'How did you pass the day before her death?'

"'We breakfasted together in the morning—a simple breakfast, which she herself got ready—and then I went into the city to complete the arrangements for our journey, and to settle my monetary affairs. This occupied several hours. At six o'clock I returned home, with the intention of taking her out to dinner; but she had a little dinner prepared for us, and said she would enjoy it much more than dining out. After dinner we chatted, and she played upon her zither.'

"'Cheerful airs?'

"'No; but she was a very sweet player, and whether her music was sad or bright, it was a pleasure to listen to it.'

"'Have you at any time observed a disposition in her to commit suicide?'

"'Never; and I never heard her utter a word to indicate that she was tired of life.'

"'Was her general health good?'

"'Yes, fairly good; she suffered a little from headaches, but she has had no serious illness in my experience of her.'

"'Describe your movements on the morning of her death.'

"'I rose at about eight o'clock, and employed an hour in packing my bags. We were to leave the house for the station at half-past ten. At nine o'clock I listened, and did not hear her move. I was not surprised at this, because she was a late riser and frequently overslept herself. During our travels we have lost trains from this cause. I went to her room, and knocked and called, and, receiving no answer, opened the door, and was immediately driven back by the fumes of gas. Dreading a calamity, I rushed in and threw the window open; then I saw my dear daughter lying motionless upon her bed. I was educated in the medical profession, though I do not follow it. I made a hasty examination of her condition and, fearing the worst, I ran for Dr. Cooper. He accompanied me back to the house, and confirmed my fears.'

"'Her bedroom door was unlocked?'

"'It was; she would never lock it, being, I think, afraid of fire. It was hard to reason her out of any of her fancies. I frequently expostulated with her upon her dislike to fresh air. I tried to induce her to keep her bedroom window open a little from the top, but I could not persuade her that it was unhealthy to sleep in a close room.'

"'That is all the information you can give us?'

"'I know nothing further.'

"Dr. Cooper's evidence tallied with that already given. He had been called to the deceased by Mr. Nisbet, who had come to him in a state of great agitation, and whom he had accompanied immediately to Lamb's Terrace, arriving at the house too late to be of any service. The unfortunate young lady had been dead for hours, and the cause of death was indisputable.

"There were no other witness and after a brief summing up a verdict was returned of death by misadventure."

I gathered from the account that the case had excited very little interest and attention, and was soon over and forgotten.

This is all I learned from the report of Mr. Dickson and the account of the inquest.

The bare facts were clear enough to the ordinary mind, that is to say, to the mind that had no profound motive to urge it to look beneath the surface. They were clear enough to me, but not in any sense satisfactory. It appeared to my judgment that the inquest was hurried over, that statements had been accepted which should have been the subject of more searching examination, and that any person deeply interested in the case would have asked questions which did not seem to have

occurred to coroner and jury. My own experience had led me to the conclusion that at these hasty inquests many important matters of detail which might have a vital bearing on the verdict are altogether overlooked. The coroners have too much to do, too many inquiries to make in the course of a few hours; the jury, dragged from their occupations without adequate remuneration, are only anxious to get the matter over and return to their businesses and homes. There should be some better method of procedure in these important investigations if it is desired that justice shall be properly served, and for my part I was stirred by an uneasy consciousness that in this instance justice had been hoodwinked. How, indeed, could I have felt differently with the specter cat lying at my feet, and looking up into my face?

The silent monitor was an irresistible force. Although the death of Beatrice Lockyer did not personally concern me, and I had no direct interest in discovering whether she died by fair means or foul, I was impelled onward by the conviction that I should never be freed from this supernatural visitation until the truth was brought to light.

It was evening when I received and read the report of the inquiry agent and the account of the inquest, and I had made no appointment to meet

Bob. On the chance of finding him at home, I took the train to Canonbury, leaving a message with Maria that if he called during my absence he was to remain till I returned. Accompanied by my spectral companion, I mounted Bob's staircase, and he, hearing my footsteps, received me on the landing.

"I half expected you," he said, casting his eyes downward.

"It is with me, Bob," I said, answering the look. "Have you seen your nephew to-day?"

"No," he replied. "I should not be surprised if he pops in to-night. You have some news?"

"Mr. Dickson has sent me certain particulars relating to the death of the young lady, whose name, as you will see, is Beatrice Lockyer. I should like to go through them with you, and to hear what strikes you as having a suspicious bearing on the case."

I handed him the papers I had brought with me, and he read them carefully.

"I doubt," he said, when he had finished, "whether Ronald knows to this day that Beatrice was not Mr. Nisbet's daughter."

"Would he not have read the account of the inquest?" I inquired.

"He could not read it himself; he was blind at the time, recollect; and I know no one who would

have inflicted upon him the pain of making him acquainted with the sorrowful details. I am convinced that these published particulars have not come to his knowledge."

"Point out weak and suspicious points, Bob."

"She was not his daughter," said Bob.

"Exactly. And therefore there was no reason why he should have had any strong affection for her."

"I suppose," said Bob, "that we had best take the worst view of anything that suggests itself."

"I don't intend to soften anything down," I replied. "At present we are doing no one an injustice, and I am inclined to accept the most terrible suggestion without shrinking. We need not give it a name, Bob. If it is in your mind as it is in mine, let it rest there till the time arrives to proclaim it aloud."

Bob nodded and said, "There was a large fortune. £60,000 is a tempting bait."

"Observe," I remarked, "that at the inquest no allusion is made to the fact that Mr. Nisbet would so largely benefit by the death of his stepdaughter."

"It is singular, Ned. Could it have been willfully suppressed?"

"If so it was suppressed by only one man—the

man who has obtained possession of the fortune. Who else at the inquest could have known anything about it? Not the coroner, certainly, or it would have been mentioned; certainly not the jury, to whom the unfortunate young lady and her stepfather were absolute strangers. Mr. Nisbet, as it appears to me, had the game entirely in his hands, and could play it as served him best. There was no one to question him or his motives, not a soul to come forward to verify or falsify anything he cared to say. He and Beatrice were alone together in this great city, cut off, as it were, from all mankind. There is no mention of the name of a single friend. On the night of her death only he and she were in the house, in that lonely, wretched house which my stupid wife had set her heart upon."

"It must have been in a better state then than it is now."

"Granted; but there are large grounds attached to the house, and there was not even a fitful gardener employed to keep it in order, who could come forward and say, 'I will tell you what I know.'"

"Are you sure of that, Ned?" asked Bob.

"Ah! It is a suggestion that must not be lost sight of. There is the value of talking a thing over in an open way. At all events, no such man makes

his appearance. Now, does it stand to reason that a lady and gentleman of ample means would willingly bury themselves in such a place? If the man had been straight minded and right minded, would he not have insisted on taking a young lady whom he calls his daughter into more comfortable quarters? He is her guardian, her protector, she has no one else to depend upon, she has no friend in whom she can confide. Although, as you say, the house must have been in a better condition then than it is now, is it at all likely that, without some sinister motive, Mr. Nisbet should have deliberately selected a residence in so cheerless a locality? He says she was averse to society. We have only his word for that. From the little concerning her which Ronald Elsdale has imparted to you it does not appear that she was disinclined to make pleasant acquaintances. Why did not her stepfather give her opportunities of doing so? On the contrary, he regards with aversion even the slight advances which a gentleman like Ronald, with everything in his favor, pays her on a legitimate occasion. Is that in his favor?"

"It tells against him distinctly."

"Your nephew describes her as a young lady of singular attractions. What does such a lady naturally look forward to? Would it not be to

marriage, to a home of her own? But, that accomplished, all chance of Mr. Nisbet coming into a fortune of £60,000 would be lost? Here we find the motive spring of his actions. It was for this, probably, that he married the mother. So dark are the thoughts that keep cropping up in my mind that I ask myself, 'How did the mother meet her death?' "

I had worked myself into a state of great excitement, and I was now restlessly pacing Bob's little room.

"Even without this evidence," I continued, pointing to the apparition of the cat, "I should suspect his motives. With such evidence I am almost ready to condemn him unheard. The arguments I bring forward seem to me reasonable and conclusive, and so far as lies in my power I will bring the matter to its rightful issue."

"I cannot blame you," said Bob, "and, as I have already told you, I will assist you if I can. The difficulty is, where to commence. You have no starting point."

"I have. The house in Lamb's Terrace. I shall put your courage to the test before I leave you to-night; but I will speak of that presently. There is another circumstance I wish to refer to with respect to Mr. Nisbet's evidence at the inquest.

He speaks of the one domestic who remained in their service after the others had left, or had been discharged."

"Why do you say discharged?"

"It has only at this moment occurred to me. Things suggest themselves as I ventilate the subject which I did not think of at first. We may be able to find one of these servants who left of their own accord, or were turned away. Keeping to this one domestic who remained faithful to them, the probability is that it was an English girl of humble origin. This being so, it is still more probable that she knew nothing of foreign countries and foreign travel; and that she could speak no language but her own."

"Well?"

"Mr. Nesbit says he sent her on to Lucerne before the day on which he intended to start with Beatrice, and that she was to proceed to Vitznau from Lucerne to attend to the rooms he had taken there. Was that not a curious thing to do, and was it likely that an ignorant London domestic could be expected to reach the place without mishap."

"It was a strange proceeding."

"It is more than strange. If we could lay hands upon that girl we might learn something useful. If we can find her people——" I paused; there were

footsteps on the stairs, and I knew, from the care that was being taken in ascending, that it was Ronald Elsdale who was coming up. I opened the door for him, and gave him good-evening. I observed again the look of discomposure on his face as he entered the room; again I saw him turn his eyes downward to the spot upon which the cat was lying. He made no reference, however, to the fancy which oppressed him, but brushed his hand across his forehead, as he had done before.

"I am glad you are here, Mr. Emery," he said. "I wished to ask you something. Why did you want to know where the young lady lived whom, but for my blindness, I should have asked to be my wife?"

I paused a moment before I spoke. I felt that the time had not arrived to take him fully into my confidence.

"I beg you will not press me," I said; "I had a reason, but I cannot disclose it at present."

"You will some day?"

"Yes, I promise you."

"Thank you. I have been thinking of it a great deal, and I felt that you did not ask the question out of idle curiosity."

"I did not. And now, if you will deal more generously to me than it may appear I am dealing to

you, I should like to ask another question or two concerning her—if," I added, "the subject is not too painful to you."

He turned to his uncle, who said, "Yes, answer the questions, Ronald."

"I will do so freely," he said.

"I assure you," I commenced, "that I am impelled by a strong and earnest motive, and that before long you shall know all that is passing in my mind. When you met her on the Continent, did she give you the impression that she was of a morbid or melancholy temperament?"

"Not at all. She was always cheerful and animated."

"Was she averse to society? Did she show that it was distasteful to her?"

"Oh, no. With modesty and discretion she seemed glad to converse with people whose manners were agreeable and becoming."

"She had a favorite instrument, had she not, upon which she was fond of playing?"

"You seem to know a great deal about her, Mr. Emery. Her favorite instrument was the zither."

"Have you heard her play upon it?"

"Yes, and her touch was sweet and beautiful."

"Would you say that her inclination was to play sorrowful or somber airs?"

"By no means. The zither does not lend itself to boisterous music, there is a tenderness in the instrument which goes to the heart. Her taste lay in the direction of sweetness; but there was nothing sorrowful or somber in her playing."

These questions answered, I succeeded in changing the subject of conversation, and Ronald stopped with us an hour, and then took his departure, saying before he left, "I rely on your promise, Mr. Emery."

When he was gone I said to Bob, "False in one thing, false in all. Mr. Nisbet's evidence at the inquest was a tissue of fabrications. Now, Bob, I am going to put you to the test. The house in Lamb's Terrace is mine for three months. Will you spend a night or two with me there?"

He looked up, rather startled at the proposition; but any uneasiness he may have felt passed away almost immediately.

"Yes," he replied. "When?"

"Not to-morrow night. It would not be fair. You have to get to the office on the following morning, and a night of unrest may interfere with your duties. Your Sundays are free. Let us fix Saturday night."

"Very well, Ned. What explanation will you give to your wife?"

"I shall exercise a pardonable deceit upon her. On Saturday afternoon you and I will be supposed to be going to Brighton for a blow. She will raise no objection and we may depend upon her not disturbing us. Untold gold would not tempt her into that house again."

"I will join you," said Bob, in a serious tone. "I should not like you to be alone there."

So it was arranged, and I bade him good-night.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN 79 LAMB'S TERRACE.

As I supposed, my wife was entirely agreeable to the seaside excursion, and professed herself delighted at the idea.

"You should go about more," she said. "Too much moping at home is bad for a man. We don't notice the changes that take place in ourselves, but others do."

"You have noticed some change in me?" I asked.

"I have. You are not half the man you used to be; your good spirits seem to have quite deserted you, and you keep looking about you in a most suspicious way."

"Tell me, Maria, in what particular way?"

"Well, as if you were afraid somebody was going to pick your pocket, or as if you fancied you had a shadow for a companion. My opinion is that you have not got over that unfortunate visit we paid to the house in Lamb's Terrace."

"Have you got over it?"

"No, and never shall. I can't keep my thoughts

away from the place, and I often feel as if something was dragging me to the house again, though a second visit would be the death of me."

"Never be tempted, Maria; don't go near the neighborhood. We both need change of scene to clear the cobwebs away. When I come back from Brighton you shall run off to the seaside for a day or two; you can easily get a lady friend to keep you company, especially if I pay all the expenses."

"Why should we not go together?"

"Because in each other's society we should brood over the frightful adventure we had. Change of company, Maria, as well as change of scene; that is what will do us good."

This conversation proved that my wife had not succeeded in forgetting the adventure, and had only refrained from speaking of it out of consideration for me. Her confession that she sometimes felt as if she was being dragged to the house against her will rather alarmed me, and I determined to adopt some means to send her from London for longer than a day or two. It would be beneficial to her, and would leave me free to act.

Before the hour arrived upon which Bob and I were to set out upon our pretended holiday, I paid a second visit to the inquiry agent, Mr. Dickson, and commissioned him to ascertain for me:

First. The name of the servant girl who was sent to Switzerland by Mr. Nisbet; where her family lived; when she returned from the Continent.

Second. The names and residences of the other servants in Mr. Nisbet's employ who had discharged themselves.

Third. Where Miss Beatrice Lockyer was buried.

Fourth. Any particulars he could gather relating to the death of Miss Beatrice's mother.

Fifth. Where Mr. Nisbet was living at the present time.

Mr. Dickson informed me that these inquiries could scarcely be answered in less than a couple of weeks, and I left them in his hands, requesting him to use expedition.

Contrary to my expectation I received a letter from him on Saturday morning, in which he informed me that he was enabled to give me imperfect answers to three of my questions.

First. The name of the servant girl who was sent to Switzerland was Molly Brand. She had no parents, and the people she lived with when she entered Mr. Nisbet's service had emigrated. At that time she had a little sister dependent upon her, a child of some six years of age. This child had presumably been taken by Molly's friends to Australia, but upon this point, and upon the point

of the child's age, he could not speak with any certainty. He had not yet succeeded in obtaining any traces of Molly from the time of her departure from London, and could not therefore say whether she had returned or where she was.

Second. From what he could gather Mr. Nisbet had had no other servants in his employ.

Third. The young lady was not buried. She was cremated at Woking.

To these scanty particulars was attached a memorandum to the effect that he was cramped by a limit I had mentioned as to the amount of the expenses to be incurred in his investigation. It was a measure of prudence I had adopted, for I was not inclined to give him quite a free hand, but it seemed to be fated that my desires to reach the heart of the mystery should be continually baffled by meeting with closed doors, and I now determined to be more liberal in my instructions. I wrote to Mr. Dickson to this effect, inwardly marveling as I wrote the letter that, in a matter in which I did not appear to be in any way personally interested, I should be impelled into a reckless course of expenditure. But, casting my eyes downward, I saw the phantom cat at my feet, and I felt that I should not be released from this frightful companion until my task was completed.

"Rest content," I said to the specter; "I will pursue it to the end."

There was no sign, no movement from it. Waiting for the development of events, it was ever on the watch. If, like Poe's raven, it had uttered but a word, it would have been a relief to me, for nothing could intensify the terror of the dread silence it preserved. There was within me a conviction that a moment would arrive when it would take some action toward the unraveling of the mystery, but in what shape this action would display itself was to me unfathomable.

At one o'clock Bob called for me, and I bade Maria good-by.

"Now, mind you enjoy yourselves," she said; "and take good care of him, Mr. Millet."

"I will do that," said Bob, rather guiltily.

He was not an adept in deception, but my wife had no suspicion that we were deceiving her, and we took our departure in peace, each of us provided with a Gladstone bag, Bob's being the bulkier of the two. In mine my wife had placed, in addition to toilet necessaries, two flat bottles, one containing brandy, the other port wine, and the usual packet of sandwiches which the middle-class feminine mind deems a positive essential for a railway journey. Bob had also provided himself with food

and liquids, and thus furnished we started upon our expedition.

On our road we discussed the information I had received from Mr. Dickson, each item of which strengthened our suspicion of foul play. The strongest feature in confirmation of this suspicion was the cremation of the body of the unfortunate young lady. We would not for one moment admit that Mr. Nisbet was an enthusiast on the subject of cremation, but accepted the course he had adopted as damning evidence against him. I mention it to show to what lengths the prejudiced mind will go in arriving at a conclusion upon an open matter; but, apart from this consideration, we certainly had ample reason for the strong feelings we entertained. A hasty inquest held by incompetent persons, the acceptance of conclusive statements from the party most interested in the young lady's death, the falsehoods of which he already stood convicted, and other falsehoods which I had little doubt would be in a short time discovered, pointed one and all to a miscarriage of justice. Bob no longer disputed the conclusions at which I arrived, but accepted them with gloomy avidity.

Needless to say that we did not set out upon our expedition without the society of my spectral familiar, and that we were both in a state of

nervous excitement as to what would occur. Bob had never been in the neighborhood of Lamb's Terrace, and its desolate appearance surprised him. Dismal and forlorn as was its aspect on the occasion of my first introduction to the region, it was still more so now. This sharpened accentuation of its desolate condition was probably caused by the knowedge I had since gained, and by the vagaries of our beautiful London climate. When we stated from home there was the promise of a tolerably fine day, but during the last half hour the sky had become overcast and dreary mists were gathering.

"Cheerful, isn't it, Bob?" I said.

"Do you mean to tell me," was his response, "that having come so far on your first visit, your wife did not immediately abandon the idea of taking a house in such a locality?"

"Whatever may have been in her mind," I replied, "she certainly insisted upon finding the house and going over it. It was offered to us at half the value of a house of such dimensions, and did you ever know a woman sufficiently strong minded to resist a bargain? I do not believe she would have had the courage to complete the arrangement, but she went quite far enough."

We turned down the narrow lane and skirted the

dilapidated wall till we arrived at our destination. As we walked through the front garden entrance, choked up with its weeds and rank grass, and ascended the flight of steps, I asked Bob how he felt.

"It is impossible not to feel depressed," he answered; "but you will not find me fail you, Ned. We will go through what we have undertaken."

"Well said. We shall get along all right till Monday morning. There was a little furniture in one or two of the rooms, and I do not suppose it has been removed. When my wife was here we only examined the front room on the second floor; the rooms I have not seen may be habitable. I expect we shall have to go out and buy some necessaries. What have you got in your bag?"

"You shall see presently."

The cat entered the house with us, but it did not remain with us in the lobby. I saw it pass down to the basement, and it gave no sign of expectation that I should accompany it.

"That's a comfort," I remarked.

I had to explain my meaning to Bob, and he seemed to regard the departure as a significant commencement of our enterprise. We did not follow our spectral companion to the basement, but proceeded upstairs to the apartments I had already seen. In all, with the exception of the front room

on the second floor, in which I had rang the bell which summoned the apparitions, there was some furniture left, and Bob expressed his astonishment that it had not been removed or sold by the last tenant.

"It would have been a simple matter," he said, "to call in a broker, who would very soon have cleared the house of every stick in it."

"He must have had his reasons," I observed. "Perhaps his coming into possession of a large fortune made him careless of these trifles."

"They are not exactly trifles," said Bob, who was better able than I to speak on the subject. "A broker would give at least fifty pounds for what is on this floor. The wonder is that the place has not been robbed."

We had not yet reached the second floor, and we now ascended to the room in which my wife and I had met with our appalling experience. Before entering it we examined the back rooms, and in one, a bedroom, we found two beds, which we determined to occupy for the night. Bob, having lived a bachelor life for many years, now showed his handiness. He examined the stove, to see that the register was up, and then he opened his Gladstone bag, the contents of which surprised me. He produced first a bundle of wood, then a remarkable

case which contained within its exceedingly limited space a kettle with a folding handle, a gridiron, two tin pannikins, knives, forks, and spoons, and a spirit lamp, fitting in each other.

"Bravo, Bob," I said; "living alone has taught you something."

He smiled, and proceeded to further surprise me, fishing out a loaf of bread, tea, sugar, a tin of condensed milk, sausages, salt, pepper, a revolver, a pack of cards, and a Bible—a motley collection of articles.

"A bachelor's *multum in parvo*," he said, adding, as he touched the revolver, "wouldn't be bad for the bush. We are short of two things, coal and water. But look here—we are in luck. A scuttle nearly full. There will be no water in the house fit to drink. We shall have to go and market, but there will not be so much to get in as I expected."

With the manner of a man accustomed to attend to his wants he knelt down and burned some paper and wood in the grate, and the draught being all right, laid the fire, but did not set light to it. Rising, he expressed a wish to see the front room.

It was, as before, quite bare and empty, and Bob said it looked as if it had not been furnished. The bell ropes were there, one broken, the other in a workable condition. I laid my hand on the unbroken cord, and cast an inquiring glance at Bob.

"Yes," he said, "pull it."

He threw the door wide open, and stood with his back to it, to prevent its closing. He held his revolver in his hand, his finger on the trigger. I gave the rope a smart tug, and, as on the previous eventful occasion, it was followed by the jangle of a host of discordant bells. The sounds died away in a low wail, and we waited in silent apprehension. But this time there was no response to the call; it was answered only by a dead silence. The feeling of relief I experienced was shared by Bob, though, curiously enough, there was an expression of disappointment in his face.

"Of course it is better as it is," he said, "but I expected something very different. Where is your apparition, Ned?"

"I cannot tell you. Thank Heaven, it is not in sight!"

"Perhaps this is an end of the matter."

"You are wrong, Bob; there is more to come before we finally leave the house."

"We will wait for it, then," he said, and I saw that he was beginning again to believe that I had been under the spell of a delusion. "And now, as we have determined to remain here two nights, we had best go and get in the things we want to make us comfortable. I will empty my bag to carry back

what we purchase, and if what we leave behind us is carried away we shall know that human, and not supernatural, agency is at work. Come along, old fellow."

We left the house and no spectral apparition accompanied us. Bob's spirits rose, and I confess that I myself was somewhat shaken by the desertion of my familiar.

We had to go some distance before arriving at a line of shops, and not wishing to attract attention I purposely selected those which lay apart from the principal thoroughfares. Our principal difficulty was water, and this we carried back with us in a zinc bucket I purchased. The shopkeeper stared at us when I asked him to fill it, but he did not refuse, and, furnished with all we required, we returned to Lamb's Terrace, and ascended to the room we intended to occupy for the night. By this time it was dark, and we lit the fire and saw to the beds. Then we prepared a meal, and were fairly jolly over it. Every few minutes one of us went into the passage and listened, but we were not disturbed by any sounds from below or above. It had been my intention to search the various rooms for some chance clew relating to the last tenant, but it was too late and dark to carry it out; I therefore postponed it till the morning. Bob

proposed a game of cards, and we sat down to cribbage, which we played till ten o'clock. Under such circumstances it was rather a lugubrious amusement, but it was better than doing nothing. After the game we drank hot brandy and water out of the pannikins, and prepared for bed. The lock of the door was in workable order, and for a wonder the key was there. We turned it, undressed, put out the light, and wished each other good-night.

"If your good wife had the slightest suspicion of our proceedings," said Bob drowsily, "she would never forgive me. I have an odd Robinson Crusoe-ish feeling upon me, as though the civilized world were thousands of miles away."

I answered him briefly, and soon heard him breathing deeply. For my part I could not get to sleep so easily. For a long time I lay awake, closing my eyes only to open them and gaze upon the monstrous, uncouth shadows which the dying fire threw upon the walls and ceiling. At length, however, I closed my eyes and did not open them again till, as I judged from the circumstance of the fire being quite out, some hours had passed. It was not a natural awakening; I was aroused by the sound of something moving in the lower part of the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

BARBARA.

I SAT up in bed, and quickly lit a candle. Bob was sleeping soundly, and I saw nothing in the room to alarm me; I was quite prepared to greet once more the apparition of my faithful companion, but as the cat was not in sight I inferred that it was contented with its quarters in the basement. On a small table by Bob's side lay his revolver, ready to his hand, and even in this moment of apprehension I smiled at the idea of my friend—the most humane man in the world—possessing so murderous an instrument. I was thankful, however, that he had brought it; powerless as it would be against spectral foes it inspired me with confidence. I slid from my bed, seized the pistol, stepped to the door and listened. My movements aroused Bob, as I intended they should, and he jumped up.

"Who's there?" he cried, clapping his hand on the table. "What's the matter?"

"Hush," I said, "make no noise. Your pistol's

all right; I've got it. Slip on your clothes, and come and keep watch while I get into mine. There's someone—or something—downstairs."

He was soon ready and he took his station by the door while I dressed myself.

"I don't hear anything," he said, when I joined him.

"All is quiet just now, Bob, but I was not mistaken. I am positive I heard it."

"What was it like?"

"Like somebody moving softly about, wishing not to be heard."

"Rats or mice, perhaps. I shouldn't wonder if the lower part of the house is full of them."

I caught his arm. "Listen, Bob."

With our ears close to the door, we both caught the sound of a stealthy movement below.

"There it is," he whispered, and I felt his arm tremble in my grasp. A moment afterward he said, "We are trapped."

"Don't lose your nerve," I responded, in as cheerful a tone as I could command; "we must see it through, now we are here. I am sorry I brought you, Bob; the next time I come, I will come alone."

"Indeed you shall not, Ned," he replied, "and I am ashamed of my weakness. I was prepared for

something of the sort, and here am I showing the white feather. I am all right now, old fellow."

"Bravo! Take your pistol; I brought a weapon with me."

It was a thick flat strip of iron, tapered at one end, which I used at home to open cases, and which, unknown to my wife, I had secreted about me. Bob nodded as I produced it.

"A formidable weapon," he said, "but useless against apparitions; we may have more formidable foes to contend with, however, and it is as well to be provided. It would be foolhardy to leave the room. We should have to carry a candle, and it might be dashed from our hands; the darkness would be horrible. We are safer where we are."

"We will not go out yet, Bob. The sound has ceased. Take a nip of brandy, and give me one."

This dialogue was carried on at intervals. We paused in the middle of sentences, and finished them as though it was our customary method of pursuing a conversation. In the fever of our senses we lost sight of the natural order of things, and the shadows created by the flickering light appeared to be in harmony with the position in which we were placed. The silence—as dread in its mysterious possibilities as threatening sounds would have been—continuing, Bob rekindled the

fire, and we remained quiescent for an hour and more. Bob looked at his watch.

"It is past two, Ned."

"Yes. I have been thinking over what is best to be done."

"Have you decided?"

"I have, but I hardly like to propose it to you."

"I am ready for anything," he said, divining my wish. "Every moment that we are shut up here grows more oppressive."

"My feeling. We are fairly strong men, and are well armed. Have you the courage to explore the house with me?"

He straightened himself and replied, "Let us set about it at once."

We adopted every reasonable precaution. We each carried a candle, and held pistol and iron bar in our right hands, firmly resolved to use them promptly in case we were attacked. Throwing open the door we stepped into the passage.

So far as we could judge from the evidence of our senses, there was not a movement in the house which did not proceed from ourselves. Slowly and cautiously I led the way downstairs, and when we reached the hall I unlocked the street door and left it ajar, thus affording a readier means of escape should the need for flight present itself. In our

progress we entered and examined every room on the three floors, and saw no spiritual or material foe. Then we descended to the basement.

As I touched the handle of the kitchen door I fancied I heard a faint sound, and looking at Bob I gathered from the expression on his face that he also was impressed by a similar fancy.

"What do you think it is?" I asked in a whisper.

"It sounds like soft breathing," he replied, in a voice as low as my own.

We paused a while, and then, receiving from Bob a silent approval, I gently pushed the door and we entered. We had not been beguiled by our fancies. In the extreme corner of the kitchen we observed a huddled heap of clothes and coverings, from beneath which issued the low breathing of a person asleep. Treading very softly we drew near to the spot, and to our astonishment beheld—no form of ruffian or bloodthirsty marauder, but the form of a child, deep in slumber.

It was a girl whose age appeared to be eleven or twelve. She was undressed, and was lying upon some strips of old carpet; other strips of old carpet and the clothes she had taken off comprised her bed coverings. Her face was not clean, but there dwelt upon it, even in her sleep, a pathetic expression of want and suffering. There was a loneliness

and helplessness in the figure of this young child slumbering unprotected in such a place which stirred me to pity. Her tangled hair lay loose across her face, and her eyelids were swollen, as if she had been weeping before the angel of sleep brought ease and oblivion to her troubled heart; one little naked arm had released itself from its wrappings, and lay exposed; it was thin, and sharp, and pointed, and the tale of woe it told accentuated the pity I felt for the child.

Bob put his pistol in his pocket, and I buttoned my coat over my weapon.

"Nothing to scare us here," he said.

"No, indeed," I replied. "See, Bob—there are three boxes of matches which look as if they have been carried in her little hands for hours. She has been trying to sell them, perhaps, to get a bit of supper. Poor soul! What brings her to this dismal, haunted hole?"

"No other roof to cover her," suggested Bob.

So engrossed had I been in the contemplation of the pathetic figure that I had not noticed another figure crouching close to it. It was the apparition of the skeleton cat, seemingly keeping guard over the child. The moment my eyes fell upon it Bob knew from my startled movement what it was I beheld.

"It is there, Ned," he said quietly.

"Yes, it is there, and this child has some connection with the mystery which hangs over this house."

He did not dispute with me. The hour, the scene, and all that had passed, were favorable to my opinion, and he accepted it without question or remonstrance. The presence of the apparition, although it was not evident to his senses, disturbed him more than it disturbed me. I was by this time accustomed to it, and the feeling of horror with which it had at first inspired me was now replaced by a feeling of agitated curiosity as to the issue of the mission upon which I was convinced we were both engaged. There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that its presence by the side of the sleeping child, in conjunction with our discovery of the child herself, was an indication that I had advanced another step toward the unraveling of the mystery.

The latter part of our conversation had been carried on in our natural voices, our desire being to arouse the child from her slumbers. As, however, she still slept on, I knelt by her side and laid my hand upon her shoulder. Even then she did not awake, and it was not till I had shaken her—which I need scarcely say I did with a gentle hand—that

she opened her eyes. With a terrified scream she started up, and then she plunged down again, and hiding her face in her clothes, began to shake and sob.

"We are not going to hurt you, my child," I said. "We are your friends. You have nothing to fear from us."

"I aint got no friends," she sobbed, "and I aint done no 'arm. Oh, please, please, let me go away!"

"Where to?" I asked.

"I don't know, I don't know," she sobbed. "Please don't do nothink to me, and let me go away."

"You shall go away if you like," I said, to soothe her, "but you must dress yourself first, you know."

"I will this minute, sir, if you'll only let me alone. Oh, my! oh, my! What shall I do, what shall I do?"

"You shall be let alone—you shall do exactly what you want to do. Only believe, my child, that we are really your friends and that we want to help you. You went to bed hungry, did you not?"

"Yes, I did, sir. I 'ad three boxes of matches, and I couldn't sell 'em, though I tried ever so. I've been all day at it, and nobody 'd buy a box or give me a ha'penny."

"Been all day at it," I said, the tears starting to

my eyes at the infinite pathos in the girl's voice; "you have been hungry all day?"

"Yes, sir, I 'ave," she answered plaintively. "I'm used to it. A boy give me a bit of bread this morning, and nothink else 'as passed my mouth all the blessed day."

"He was a good boy to be so kind to you." I turned to Bob. "Would you mind going upstairs alone, Bob, and bringing down some bread and butter and sausage. Then the little girl will believe that we wish to be as good to her as the boy was this morning."

Bob did not hesitate. All his fears had vanished, and he hastened from the kitchen, and soon returned with food and a cup of cold tea. Meanwhile I continued to speak to the child in my kindest tones, and she mustered courage to peep at me two or three times, and each time, I was pleased to observe, with renewed confidence. Once she asked why I had asked the gentleman if he wouldn't mind going upstairs alone, and I replied that my friend was rather timid because the house was so lonely.

"It is, sir," she said upon this; "it's awful!"

"In what way, my dear?" I inquired, but she closed her lips firmly, and did not answer. I did not urge her, deeming it prudent not to press her until her confidence in us was completely won.

"Now, my dear," I said upon Bob's return, "sit up and eat this. The tea is cold, but we will give you a cup of hot tea presently if you care to have it. And see—I will buy your matches of you. Here is sixpence for them."

Her eyes, with wonder in them, were raised to mine, and her hot fingers closed over the coin, as she tremblingly sat up in her wretched bed, and wiped her tears away with her naked arm.

"Thank yer, sir," she murmured, and she began to eat and drink. Never in my life have I beheld a human being devour food so eagerly and ravenously, and she made no pause till she had drained the cup and disposed of every crumb.

"Do you feel better?" I asked, with a smiling nod at her.

"Ever so much, sir; thank yer kindly," she said humbly and gratefully. "I'm good for another day."

"And for many more after that," I said. "I dare say we shall be able to do something for you if you are a good girl."

"I aint bad, sir," she said, with an imploring look; "don't believe that I am. I never forgit what Molly sed——" she stopped with a sudden gasp. "You aint come from 'er, 'ave yer, sir?"

"From Molly, my dear? No, we have not come from her. Who is Molly?"

"My sister, sir," she replied with a sigh; "the only one, I aint got no other brothers or sisters."

"You have a mother and father, my dear?"

"No, sir, there was only Molly and me."

"Some relatives, surely?"

"No, sir, not as I knows on."

"Have you no home, my dear?"

"No, sir, 'xcept this, unless you turn me out of it."

"If we do turn you out of it, my child, it will be to put you in a better one."

"Don't, sir; oh, please don't!" she cried.

"Not put you in a more comfortable home, my dear?" I asked in surprise.

"I don't want a more comfortable one, sir, till Molly comes back. If she don't find me 'ere, where's she to look for me, and 'ow am I to know? I 'ope you won't turn me away; I do 'ope it, sir!"

"There, there, my dear," I said, "you need not distress yourself. Depend upon it we will do nothing that you do not wish done, and that is not for your good. We will see about it all presently. Where is your sister?"

"That's wot I want to know, sir; that's wot I want to find out. Oh, wot wouldn't I give if I knew where Molly was!"

There was pregnant matter here for me to think

about. The child did not want to find another home till her sister came back. Came back where? To this Heaven-forsaken house. It was here that Molly would come to look for the poor little waif. The conclusion was that Molly knew something of the house, was familiar with it, else she would not expect to find her young sister in it. Was it a reasonable conclusion that she knew something of the last tenant, and could give me some information concerning him? I did not pursue the subject with the little girl in this direction, deeming it best to await a more advantageous opportunity for learning what I desired to know.

"What was it Molly said to you that you will never forget?" I asked.

"She said, Molly did, 'Look 'ere, Barbara, mind you're good, and mind you allus keep good. If you don't you shan't be no sister of mine.' That's wot I won't forgit as long as ever I live. But O Molly, Molly, why don't you come back? Why don't you come back!"

The imploring earnestness of this appeal powerfully affected me, and I gazed pitifully at poor Barbara, from whose eyes the tears were streaming. That when she put her hands up to her eyes, she should keep her little fist tightly clenched, touched me to the heart; the little silver piece was her

shield against hunger, for a few hours at least, and she clung to it instinctively through all her grief. I waited till she was calmer before I said:

"Dress yourself quickly, Barbara, and come upstairs with us. There's a nice fire there, and I want to talk to you about Molly. We will try and find her for you, and you shall not be hungry again. Will you trust me?"

"Yes, sir, I will; no one could speak kinder, and you're not the sort of gentleman to take me in. Perhaps you won't mind telling me 'ow long you've been 'ere. I didn't know there was anybody in the house but me."

"We came only a few hours ago, Barbara," I answered, "and I have been here but once before."

"Wot did you come the first time for, sir?"

"The house is to let, and I thought of taking it."

"To live in, sir?"

"Yes, to live in."

"But you're never going to, sir?"

"No, I am not going to."

"I should say yer wouldn't," she muttered. "Who would, I'd like to know? What did you come for this time, sir?"

"I will tell you more when you're dressed," I said. "It will be warmer and nicer upstairs. Be as quick as you can."

Bob and I went out of the kitchen while Barbara put on her ragged garments, in which she looked a truly miserable object; Bob patted her cheek, and I took her hand and led her upstairs, the cat following at our heels. I noticed that she kept her eyes closed most of the time, and that when she lifted her lids she did so timorously and apprehensively, but I refrained at present from asking her the reason of this. It was only when we were in the room which we had selected for our sleeping apartment that she opened her eyes and kept them open.

"Now, Barbara," I said, putting a chair by the fireside for her, "sit down there, and warm yourself; then we will talk."

She sat down obediently, and spread out her thin hands to the comforting flame, and with a kind of wonder watched Bob as he put the kettle on and prepared to make the tea. He poured out a cup, and put in milk and sugar liberally, and gave it to her. She thanked him and drank it, saying when the cup was empty, "That's good, sir."

"Are you ready to talk, Barbara?" I asked.

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"I am going to ask you a good many questions, and perhaps they'll lead to good."

"I'll answer all I can, sir."

"So you sleep in this house regularly, Barbara?"

"Yes, sir; I aint got no other place. Where else 'd I go to, I'd like to know?"

"How long have you lived here?"

"I can't tell you that, sir; it must be years and years."

"Since the house has been untenanted, perhaps?"

"Unwhat, sir?"

"I mean, Barbara, since it has been empty?"

"I dessay, sir. I know one thing—it was three weeks to a day after Molly went away that I first come 'ere, and I've 'ardly missed a night all the time. There was twice I couldn't git in for the snow, and I was 'most perished. When I did git in I was that numbed and froze that I could 'ardly move, but I knew I was done for if I didn't stir my pegs, so I put some sticks on the 'earthstone and set fire to 'em, and little by little I got thawed. It was touch and go with me then, sir, but I managed to dodge 'em that time. I don't know as I'd 'ave cared much one way or the other if it 'adn't been for Molly. Once there wos a gal she knew that throwed 'erself in the water, and she sed to me, sed Molly, 'It wos a wicked thing to do, Barbara,' she sed. 'There's 'eaven,' sed Molly, 'and there's 'ell,' she sed. 'If we do good things we go to 'eaven, if we do wicked things we go to the other place.'

It's the way Molly used to talk to me that's kept me up over and over agin."

I had made up my mind not to interrupt Barbara even when she wandered from the subject in which I was most interested. By doing so I might lose valuable suggestions to be gathered from her chance words, and I naturally wished to hear everything it was in her power to impart. Impatient as I was to learn more of Molly—who evidently was imbued with a strong sense of duty, and whose story, I felt convinced, had a direct connection with the mystery I was endeavoring to solve—I recognized the advantage of leading gradually up to it. It was by far the wisest plan to allow her to ramble on in her own way, and not to startle her by abrupt questions.

"Why did you not light the fire in the stove, Barbara?"

"I wosn't sech a mug as that, sir," she replied with a faint dash of humor. "When smoke comes out of the chimney of a empty 'ouse the peeler sez, 'Ho, ho!' and in he pops to find out who's done it. Wot 'd become of me then, I'd like to know? They'd 'ave made precious short work of me."

"And you have not lit a fire in a stove all the time you have been here."

"Never once, sir."

"How did you manage for coals, Barbara?"

"Well, sir, when I first come, there was a lot of coal in the cellar, and I used it all up. It lasted ever so long, but there was a end to it. Then I begun on the furniture and odd bits of sticks I found inside the house and out. Sometimes when it was dark and rainy I foller the coal wagons, and pick up wot drops from the sacks. Then there's dead branches; I've got 'arf a cupboardful downstairs."

"What time did you come"—I hesitated at the word—"home to-night?"

"Past one, I think, sir. I kep' out late trying to sell my matches, but I 'ad to give it up for a bad job."

"It was you we heard moving about?"

"Did I make a noise, sir? I don't, 'ardly ever, but I s'ppose I wos desp'rate, being so 'ungry, and thinking wot I should do to-morrer for grub. I wosn't long gitting my clothes off, cos I wanted to git to sleep quick and forgit everythink and everybody—everybody but Molly. I'm 'appy when I'm asleep, sir."

"Poor child! Do you mean to tell me, Barbara, that all these years you have never once been found out, that all these years you have come and gone from the house without being seen."

"Yes, sir, as fur as I know. If I aint clever in nothink else I've been clever in that. Oh, but the way I've had to dodge, and the tricks I've played! They'd fill a book if they wos took down. Allus coming 'ome late at night, looking about me, and turning another way if anybody wos near; allus very careful when I went out agin, peeping round corners, and 'iding quick if I 'eerd a step. Eyes, sir! I can see a mile off. Ears, sir! I could 'ear a blade o' grass whisper."

"You have had a hard life, my dear," I said, taking her hand. Despite her ragged clothes she looked more comfortable now. There was no wolf tearing at her vitals for food. This, and the warmth of the fire, the excitement of the conversation, the consciousness that we were her friends, and the novelty of such an association in a house in which she had not heard the voice of a human being during all the years she had slept and starved in it, had caused her cheeks to glow and her eyes to sparkle.

"Yes, sir, there's no denying it's 'ard, but it 'll be all right when I see Molly agin."

"You expected to do so long before now?"

"Oh, yes, sir, ever so long before. She can't 'ave forgot me, she can't 'ave forgot me! You don't think that, do yer, sir?"

"I am sure she has not, my dear. She was always a good sister to you, from what you have told me, and always a good girl."

"The best in all the wide world, sir. There's nobody like 'er, I don't care where you look. 'I'm more than yer sister Molly,' she sed, 'I'm yer mother, and I'll never, never turn from yer as long as I live.'"

"Tell me, Barbara. What was your sister?"

"A servant gal, sir. I'd like to be one."

"Was she in a situation in London?"

"In course she wos, sir."

"Where?"

"In this 'ouse, sir. That's why I'm 'ere now."

And that, thought I, looking down at the cat, is why *I* am here now. I glanced at Bob; the revelation that poor Barbara's sister was in domestic service with the last tenant had brought a flush of expectation into his face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOLLY.

I CONTINUED the conversation.

"That must be a long time ago, Barbara?"

"Oh, yes, sir; ever so long ago."

"What was the name of her master?"

"I don't remember, sir."

"If you heard it, would you remember it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it Mr. Nesbit?"

"That's the name, sir. 'E 'ad a daughter, sech a nice young lady, Molly told me."

"Miss Beatrice Nesbit?"

"That's 'er, sir. Molly was so fond of 'er, and she liked Molly, too."

"Do you know, Barbara, what became of Miss Beatrice?"

"No, sir; do you?"

I evaded the question. "Can you read?" I asked.

"Large letters, when they're wrote plain, sir."

"You can't read newspapers?"

"No, sir."

"When Molly went away—we will speak about that presently—did nobody tell you that something had happened in this house?"

"No, sir; I didn't speak about Molly or the 'ouse to nobody, and nobody spoke to me. Wot did 'appen, sir?"

"Never mind just now. It is for me to ask questions."

"I beg yer pardon, sir."

"No need, Barbara. Where and how did you live, my dear, while Molly was in service here?"

"It's 'ard to say, sir. I lived anywhere and any-'ow. If it 'adn't been for Molly I don't think I'd 'ave lived at all. She used to say, used Molly, 'One day we'll live together, Barbara. When yer grows up, per'aps Miss Beatrice 'll give yer a place with 'er. Then we shall be in the same 'ouse, and we'll be as 'appy as the day's long.' The day aint come yet, sir."

"When Molly worked here used you to come and see her?"

"On the sly, sir. Mr. Nesbit, Molly sed, wouldn't allow no followers, and nobody else come to the 'ouse that didn't 'ave no business there, so I 'ad to come unbeknown to 'im. One night I wos in the kitching when Molly 'eard 'im coming down. She 'id me quick be'ind the clothes 'orse, as 'ad

some things drying. It was lucky for me and Molly that he didn't ketch sight of me, or he'd 'ave bundled us both out. My 'eart wos in my mouth all the time."

"You saw Mr. Nesbit?"

"Yes, sir; I peeped through the things and sor 'im."

"A nice looking gentleman, Barbara?"

"Quite the other, sir; but 'e spoke smooth to Molly."

"Did you ever see Miss Beatrice?"

"Once, sir, the same way, and I think she knew I wos 'iding, but she never sed nothink. She was the nicest looking young lady I ever sor."

"Tell me about Molly going away."

"She sed she was going into the country with 'er master and Miss Beatrice, and that she wouldn't be away long. She give me some money, and promised to send me some more every week, but I aint 'eerd nothink of 'er from that day to this. There wos Mrs. Simpson, sir; she let me sleep in a corner of 'er room. She wos allus 'ard up, Mrs. Simpson wos, and two weeks after Molly wos gone she got into trouble, and went away, I don't know where to, and I'd no place to put my 'ead in. I walked about the streets and slep' in the park, and then I thought I'd come 'ere and wait for Molly. There

wos nothink else for it, 'cause Mrs. Simpson 'ad cut 'er lucky, and Molly wouldn't know where else to look for me. It wos orfle lonesome 'ere at fust, and I wos frightened out of my life almost; but I got used to it after a bit, and it *wos* a slice of luck, wosn't it, sir, that I found a place to sleep in without being arsked to pay no rent? Then there wos the coal cellar pritty well full of coals, and lots of wood to make a fire with. Daytime I'd go out selling matches, begging, doing anythink to make a honest penny, and it wosn't easy to do that, I can tell yer. But 'ere I am, no better off and no wus since I begun, and never found out till to-night."

"You must have managed very cleverly, Barbara."

"Oh, they don't make 'em much artfuller nor me," said the poor girl rather proudly. It was a pitiful boast from one who had suffered such hardships, and who, after years of struggle, presented so lamentable an appearance. "I aint told yer all, though," she continued eagerly. "I don't keep no count of the days 'xcept with bits of sticks—one stick, Monday, two sticks, Tuesday, three sticks, Wednesday, up to six sticks, Satterday, and then I know to-morrer's Sunday, and I begin all over again. Weeks I don't know 'ow to reckon, and that's why I can't tell 'ow long Molly's been away.

I dessay it was three months when a Satterday night come—not the last by a good many—and I got 'ome as 'ungry as 'ungry could be, and not a ha'penny to get grub with. So wot do I do but prowl about on the chance of finding somethink that 'll 'elp me on. Molly used to sleep in the basement, next to the kitching, and there's a cupboard in the room. Wot 'yer think I found in that there cupboard on the top shelf, that I 'ad to stand on two chairs to git to? A wooden money-box, sir, that rattled as I shook it up. There wos letters outside wrote large by Molly, 'For Barbara.' Yer might 'ave knocked me down with a feather when I sor it, and I did tumble off the chairs and 'urt myself, but I 'ad the money box in my 'and for all that. It wos locked, and there wos no key, but I soon prised it open, and there it was, 'arf full of coppers that Molly 'd been saving up for me, else she wouldn't 'ave wrote 'For Barbara' outside. Wosn't that good of Molly, sir?"

"Indeed it was," I replied.

"I counted it out—six and tenpence, no less, sir, and I kissed the box, and the writing, and the money too, and I only wanted Molly alongside of me to make me as 'appy as the day's long. It lasted me a long while, that money did."

"Did you ever find any more?" I asked.

"No, sir, though I looked everywhere for it."

"Now, Barbara, can you tell me the name of the place your sister was going to with Mr. Nisbet and Miss Beatrice?"

"No, sir, she didn't know 'erself, she sed, but she promised to write to me—in large letters—directly she got there."

"Where did she say she would send the letter?'

"To the house that Mrs. Simpson lived in, sir."

"You remained in that house two weeks after Molly went away?"

"Yes, sir."

"And no letter came?"

"No, sir."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"Mrs. Simpson didn't git none for me, sir—I'm sure of that, 'cause I know she wouldn't deceive me. Why should she? It wouldn't 'ave done 'er no good to keep it from me; and she wosn't one of that sort. Then, sir, there wos the two postmen as used to leave the letters in the street. I made bold to arsk both of 'em about it, 'Is there a letter for Barbara, wrote large, please?' I sed to them every day, and they sed no, there wosn't. 'You won't give it to no one else, will yer, please, when it comes?' I sed to them and they sed they wouldn't. After Mrs. Simpson wos gone I went to the street

regularly, and 'ung about for the postmen, and arsked 'em if there wos a letter for Barbara, or if there'd been one, and they allus sed no, and that they'd keep it for me if they got 'old of it. But it never come, sir. I couldn't 'ave done nothink else to make sure of it, could I, sir?"

"You could do nothing more, Barbara; and you were very clever in doing what you did. Did you understand from Molly that she was going abroad?"

"Abroad, sir!" exclaimed Barbara, in manifest astonishment.

"Out of England, I mean."

"Oh, no, sir; she'd 'ave been sure to 'ave told me if she'd 'ad any idea of that. And she'd never 'ave done it, sir; she'd never 'ave gone so fur away from me!"

"I don't think she would, Barbara, if she had known it. Did she tell you she was going alone first, and that her master and Miss Beatrice were to follow afterward?"

"No, sir, they wos to go all together."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as I can be, sir."

"You have given me sensible answers to all my questions, my dear. I noticed when you came upstairs with us that you kept your eyes closed. I suppose you were sleepy."

"It wasn't that, sir."

"What was the reason?"

"I was frightened, sir."

"Of what?"

Barbara looked around timidly, and drew closer to the fire. "There's shadders in this 'ere 'ouse," she said, in a low tone.

"There are shadows everywhere, Barbara," I answered, as Bob and I exchanged glances. "Tell us what you mean."

"I can't, sir; it's beyond me. I 'eerd once, permiscuous like, that there wos a 'ouse somewhere in these parts as wos 'aunted, and I sed to mysèlf, 'It's this one.' Then I begun to feel shadders about. It's months and months since I've come 'igher than the kitching; I've been frightened to. It's allus as if somethink wos going to 'appen, and when you woke me up to-night I thought it 'ad."

"You began to *feel* shadows about, Barbara?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what have you seen?"

"Nothink, sir; but I know they're 'ere."

"Have you heard anything?"

"Only a shaking and rattling, sir."

"When there was a wind blowing, Barbara. From your description that must have been what you heard. Some of the window sashes are loose,

and of course, in a high wind, they would make a noise." Barbara did not answer, but seemed dubious, and at the same time a little relieved. I glanced at the cat at my feet. "You have seen nothing to-night?"

"No, sir."

"You see no shadows now?"

"No, sir."

In these replies there was no such confirmation of my own strange experiences as I had expected, and hoped, to receive when she began to speak of shadows, and I ascribed her fears to the natural nervousness of a child living in a lonely house. They were no stronger than sensitive children living in comfortable homes, with parents and brothers and sisters around them, often suffer from. I had tired Barbara out with my string of questions; her eyelids were closing and opening; her head was nodding. In the silence that ensued she closed her eyes, and did not open them again. The child had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

BOB and I conversed in whispers; but Barbara was sleeping so soundly that we might have spoken in our natural voices without fear of awaking her.

"What do you think of it, Bob?" I asked.

"I don't know what to think," he replied. "I only know one thing—that the child has spoken the truth."

"Of that there is no doubt," I said; "but what does it point to?"

He conveyed his answer in two words, "Foul play!"

I nodded.

"My own opinion, not newly formed, for I have had it all along; but what we have been told gives a new turn to it. And still," I added fretfully, "we are in the dark. Where can we look for direction as to the next step to be taken?"

"Has it not occurred to you," said Bob, "that it was singular that Mr. Nisbet should have had the body of his stepdaughter cremated instead of buried in the usual manner?"

"He may be an enthusiast on the subject of cremation," I observed. "Many eminent men advocate such a disposal of the dead."

"There is another answer to the question. We are both agreed that there has been foul play. If we are right, Mr. Nisbet, by having the body cremated, has effectually destroyed the most important evidence that could be sought against him."

"The doctor testified at the inquest to the cause of the young lady's death."

"Ah, the doctor. The inquiry agent gave you his name, I believe?"

"He did. It is Cooper."

"Might not something be gained from him?"

I caught at the suggestion.

"A good thought, Bob."

"We do not know," continued my shrewd adviser, "who this Dr. Cooper is, whether he is a practitioner of repute, and whether any relations of a confidential nature existed between him and Mr. Nisbet."

"You are letting in light," I said. "Go on."

"So far as you have gone you are ignorant of this doctor's standing. If he holds a good position, if he has an extensive practice, we shall obtain no assistance from him. No respectable medical man would run a risk for the sake of a bribe. As a rule,

doctors are the kindest men in the world; but here and there you may meet with a backslider, or with one who has been careless in such a matter as this, or with one whose necessities lay him open to temptation. That is the extent of my suggestion; but it appears to me to be worth following up—on the off-chance, as sporting men say."

"It shall be followed up," I said. "To-morrow I will make inquiries concerning him. And now we will get a little sleep. It is not likely we shall be disturbed again."

We lay down in our clothes, and were awake betimes. But Barbara was up before us; and when we rose we found the room nicely tidied up, a bright fire burning, the kettle singing on the hob, and the table ready spread for breakfast.

"Bravo, Barbara," I said. "You are a handy little girl."

"I thought you'd like it done, sir," she said; "and I moved about very quiet so as not to wake yer. I slep' like a top, and I feel ever so much better than I did last night. But yer did give me a start, yer did, when yer come upon me in the kitching."

"You are not sorry for it now?"

"I'm glad, sir. It was a reg'lar slice of luck."

"You shall find it so. Any more shadows, Barbara?"

"No, sir. I never feel 'em in the daytime; it's only at night that I'm afeerd."

"We'll put a stop to all that, my girl. Let us get breakfast over; I dare say you're ready for it."

"That I am, sir. I'm allus ready to tuck in."

Despite the seriousness of our situation, we were quite a cheerful party. We had provided liberally, and we made a hearty meal, Barbara, to our mingled pity and admiration, proving herself a champion in that line. Had she been of colossal proportions instead of an attenuated mortal, literally all skin and bone, she could scarcely have eaten more. A full meal was a delightful novelty to her, and she greatly distinguished herself.

"I wouldn't call the queen my aunt," she declared, when we rose from the table, which we considered a very original remark, although its application was not exactly clear.

While she was clearing away the things and washing up, Bob and I had a consultation. It was decided that he should remain indoors with Barbara, and that I should go out to make inquiries for Dr. Cooper. During my absence it was his intention to thoroughly examine the house from top to bottom. He had the idea that he might light upon something that would furnish a clew; and as he had greater experience than I in unten-

anted houses, he was the better fitted for such a search.

It being Sunday, the facilities for seeking information were limited; but in the by-streets I found a common cigar shop open here and there, and I laid out a great many pennies without satisfactory result.

At length, however, I entered a poor little shop, which I was told had been established for several years. An elderly woman answered to my raps on the counter; and after spending sixpence with her, I led up to the important subject, and soon discovered that I was on the track. Dr. Cooper had lived in the neighborhood, not very far from her shop; but he had removed two or three years ago to another part of London. Was he a doctor in good practice? She could not say as to that. He was a poor man's doctor, and gave advice and medicine for a shilling. He had a large family, and did not pay his way. Then his business could not have been a flourishing one? Not at all; he had run away in debt to everybody—to her among the number. But by accident she found out his new place of business, and had served him with a county court summons. He had run up a bill of twenty-five shillings with her, and he pleaded that he was not in a position to pay it. Judgment was given

for her, and he was ordered to pay half a crown a month, which, he said, was the utmost he could afford. The trouble she had to get her money! She had to threaten him over and over again, and at last succeeded in obtaining what was due to her.

"A bad lot, sir," she said. "Always drinking on the sly, and as fit to attend to sick people as my old cat there. If I was dying, and there was not another doctor in London, I wouldn't call him in."

Had she any objection to give me his address? Not the least objection. She ought to know it, as she had been there twenty times to get her money. It was in Theobald's Row, South Lambeth, when she saw him last; she did not remember the number, but there were not many houses in the Row, and I should have no difficulty in finding it; "if he hasn't run away again," she added.

I left the shop, thanking the chance that had led me to it. In the information I had gained there was pregnant matter for thought. That a wealthy gentleman like Mr. Oliver Nisbet should call in such a man in a case of life and death was something more than strange; it was in the highest degree suspicious, and I felt confident that some information of importance to my mission was to be

elicited from one whose necessities, as Bob had observed, might lay him open to the temptation of a bribe. South Lambeth was a long way from the north of London; but so anxious was I to lose no time, that I determined to proceed there at once.

With this intention I walked into the wider thoroughfares to look for a cab, and was about to hail one when a man walking quickly toward me, stopped as we came close to each other, and accosted me.

"Why, Mr. Emery," he said, "I heard you were in Brighton."

It was Mr. Dickson, the private inquiry agent.

"I am in London, as you see," I replied. "Who told you I was in Brighton?"

"I learned it at your house two hours ago."

I groaned inwardly, thinking of what was in store for me if my good wife discovered that I was deceiving her.

"Did you see my wife?"

"No, a servant answered the bell, and said you had run down to the seaside for the day."

"I wished the business between us," I said rather severely, "to be kept secret. What took you to my house, Mr. Dickson?"

"Oh, there was no fear of my saying anything about the commission you gave me. I did not

even leave my name." I breathed more freely. "I went to see you because I had something to tell you which I thought you would like to know immediately."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Nisbet is in London," replied Mr. Dickson.

CHAPTER XX.

DR. COOPER.

I CAUGHT my breath. There was nothing strange in the information; for all I knew Mr. Nisbet might have been in London for years, as ignorant of my existence as, until lately, I had been of his; but the accidental discoveries of the last few hours seemed to me to be pregnant with important possibilities.

"I am glad you have lost no time in telling me," I said. "How did you discover it?"

"Almost by accident. I have a partner, whose methods are of the quiet order, I being the active worker in our business, and it is he who made the discovery—almost by accident, as I have said. Nisbet is not a very uncommon name, but tack Oliver to it, and it becomes exceptional. Yesterday there arrived from the Continent a gentleman bearing those two names, and he is now at the Hôtel Métropole."

This destroyed the hypothesis that Mr. Nisbet had been a constant resident in London since my introduction to the skeleton cat.

"From what part of the Continent?" I inquired.

"Lastly from Paris; but by way of Paris from any one of a hundred different places. Can you give me a personal description of the gentleman?"

"No," I replied, "I have never seen him; but I can obtain it for you."

"Do so, and let me have it as soon as possible. At present my partner is shadowing him, and he will not be lost sight of. You will never guess where I have just come from, Mr. Emery."

"I shall be glad to hear."

"In the course of such a business as ours," said Mr. Dickson, "we become acquainted with strange things, which, as a rule, we keep to ourselves, secrecy being an integral part of our operations. Some cases take hold of us, some do not, and I confess that my curiosity—a human weakness, you know—has been excited in this particular case. So, after leaving your house, the idea entered my mind of strolling to Lamb's Terrace and having a look at No. 79. That is where I have just come from."

"You have not been inside the house," I said, rather startled, as I thought of Bob and Barbara.

"How could I get inside," he retorted, "without the key? What a melancholy, Heaven-forsaken

place! I will tell you what occurred to me, if you like."

"Yes, tell me."

"Just the spot for a crime, thought I as I wandered about; just the spot to carry out a deep-laid scheme in comparative safety. I have no wish to pry into your secrets, Mr. Emery; but one cannot help what comes unbidden into one's mind, and men engaged in such pursuits as mine are more open to suspicion than others. We see shadows behind locked doors, we work out theories in the dark, and sometimes we come upon unexpected results. However, it is no affair of mine, as my own personal interests are not involved in it."

"If they were," I hazarded, "you would follow it up."

"Undoubtedly. I could not possibly evade the duty, with three such links as a sudden death, a cremation instead of a burial, and a vast fortune on the issue."

"And if you were to add," I thought, "the experiences I have gone through, you would be still less inclined to rest till the mystery was unraveled." Aloud I said, "Do not let the matter flag for a few pounds. I am most anxious to work it out, if there is a possibility of doing so."

"It shall not flag. The mischief of it is, the

most important clews are destroyed. Only through the principal agent can the crime—if one has been committed—be brought to light."

"Or through an accomplice," I suggested.

"Quite so. But where to look for this accomplice—there lies the difficulty. Still it is the unexpected that often happens. Well, good-day, Mr. Emery; I hope to hear from you to-morrow."

Theobald's Row, South Lambeth, if not so desolate a neighborhood as Lamb's Terrace, was sufficiently depressing in its general aspect to cause one to resolve to give it a wide berth unless special business called him to the spot. There were sad, melancholy railway arches which might serve for a chapter in a modern "Inferno"; there were timber yards stacked high with discolored lumber, which appeared to be piled up not for purposes of trade, but to add one more melancholy feature to a worn-out, dilapidated locality; there were workingmen's lodging houses, whose flat surface of stone walls resembled prisons in which every vestige of brightness in life was hopelessly entombed; there were rows of houses as hopeless and despairing, and as poverty-stricken and irremediably shabby; and there was the most leaden atmosphere of which even London could boast. The men, women, and

children I saw there were in keeping with their surroundings; the youngsters were playing listlessly and with no heart in their games; the men smoked pipes and haunted street corners or wandered in and out the beer shops and public houses; the worn-faced women conversed jadedly and dispiritedly; and everywhere the spirit of discontent proclaimed itself. Even the dogs nosing the gutters were infected with the prevailing gloom.

In the center of Theobald's Row, which consisted of sixteen small houses, eight on each side, and all of a flat dead level, I came upon Dr. Cooper's place of business, a parlor window, with two large dust-covered bottles displayed therein, whose ghostly colors were green and red. Half a dozen ragged children were disporting themselves on the doorstep, and as I approached the shop a slatternly woman came to the door and swooped them all into the house. As she was turning to follow them I accosted her.

"Is Dr. Cooper at home?"

"What-do you want of him?" she retorted.

"I wish to see him on a matter of business."

I had stepped into the shop, and as I looked around at the nearly empty shelves, dotted here and there with a few miserable fly-blown bottles, I thought that a man in search of health or of a

remedy for a bodily ailment could not have found a more unlikely place for relief.

"Is it opening medicine?" said the woman. "I can serve you."

"My business is not professional," I replied.

She cast a suspicious glance at me, and I guessed that she supposed me to be a dun.

"It may be something of advantage to him," I observed.

She brightened up instantly.

"My husband is not in," she said; "but you may find him at the George."

"At the George?"

"Or the Green Dragon," she added.

"Where are they? Far from here?"

"Oh, no, not far; he has to keep himself handy in case he is called in anywhere. The George is at the corner of the next street, and the Green Dragon is at the opposite corner. If he is not at either of those places he is sure to be at the Britannia. Anybody will tell you where that is."

As I walked to "the corner of the next street" I could not help smiling at the idea of Dr. Cooper being so considerate as to pass his time in a public house, within convenient hail of his place of business, in case he might be "called in anywhere"; but I pitied those who needed his assistance in a

case of sickness. He was not at the George, and I was advised to try the Green Dragon; he was not at the Green Dragon, and I was advised to try the Britannia; and at the Britannia I found him.

He was a washed-out, weedy man, with an inflamed countenance, and when I presented myself he was in the act of clinking pewter pots with some boon companions, who, according to my judgment, were standing treat to him. He drained his pot to the dregs, and turned it upside down on the counter, with a thirsty air about him notwithstanding the long draught he had just taken. I am not a teetotaler, nor an advocate of teetotalism, but it has always been a matter of regret to me that the persevering search for enlightenment on the part of the British public at the bottom of pewter pots does not lead to more encouraging results.

At the moment of my entrance he and his companions were discussing a criminal case which had excited great interest and had largely occupied the newspapers for several days past. It was a supposed case of poisoning, and the person charged—it was a woman—had been acquitted after a long trial. Her husband had been the victim; but the medical evidence was inconclusive, and she had been given the benefit of the doubt. The woman and her husband had been on proved bad terms,

and she had much to gain by his death. There was a man in the case, the woman's lover, and there was a strong suspicion that he was implicated; but, guilty or not guilty, he was not arraigned because no direct evidence could be brought against him. Only on the previous night had the case been concluded, and the result was published in the Sunday morning's papers, the jury having been locked up for eight hours before they arrived at their verdict.

"She's escaped by the skin of her teeth," said one of the topers. "If I'd been on the jury she'd have had the rope."

"Law's law," said a half-tipsy Solon, "and justice is justice. I don't believe in hanging a woman upon presumption. My opinion is that he poisoned himself to get rid of her."

"That's a queer way of getting rid of a nuisance," was the reply. "Besides, there was no poison found in the body."

"You're all at sixes and sevens," said a third speaker. "The doctors disagreed, and the weight of evidence was in favor of the woman. She's as artful as you make 'em; but that's no reason for hanging her."

"The man was killed," persisted the first speaker. "He didn't die a natural death."

"Nothing was proved," said the third speaker,

"and when nothing's proved you can't bring anyone in guilty. This is a free country, I believe."

What struck me in the expression of these opinions—if opinions they could be called—was their utterly illogical bearing. It was like a lot of weathercocks arguing; and when the half-tipsy Solon said, "Ask the doctor," they turned toward him, as though a direct question had been put to him, which he, as a weighty authority, could answer in a word, and thus settle the whole matter.

"What I say is," said Dr. Cooper thirstily and with indistinct utterance, "that there are more ways of killing a man than one."

"Ah," they all observed in effect, "Dr. Cooper knows."

What it was that Dr. Cooper knew with respect to the case was not very clear. What I knew, when I heard him speak, was that he was drunk. Quickly came to my mind the suggestion whether he would be of more service to me drunk than sober.

"Who's going to stand treat?" he inquired, with a nervous fingering of his pewter pot.

"Your turn, doctor," they said.

"If it's my turn," he replied pettishly, "you'll have to wait."

They laughed, and left him one by one. Then

he asked for liquor across the counter; but the barman shook his head and devoted himself to ready-money customers. I saw my opportunity, and advancing toward him, asked if he would join me in a friendly glass.

"In a friendly glass," he said, "I would join Old Nick himself."

A declaration which, frank as it was, could scarcely be said to be a recommendation. It was a peculiar feature of Dr. Cooper's tipsy condition that, although his speech was thick and somewhat indistinct, he did not slur or clip his words, which denoted that he still preserved some control over himself.

"Beer or whisky, doctor?" I asked.

"Whisky for choice," he said. "Irish."

Whisky it was, and Irish; I spilled mine on the floor, and filled my glass with water. Dr. Cooper dealt with his as he dealt with the beer; it was evidently not his habit to take two bites at a cherry.

"Another?" I suggested.

"You're a gentleman," he said.

When he had disposed of this second portion in a similar manner to the first, I opened the ball, and inwardly took credit to myself for rather artful tactics,

"I came down this way, doctor," I said, "especially to see you."

He seized my wrist with one hand, and put the other into his waistcoat pocket, removing it immediately, however, with a husky cough and an angry shake of his head.

"No, no, doctor," I said, laughing, as he fumbled at my pulse, "I do not need professional advice to-day. The fact is, I have come to pay an old debt."

He retained my hand, as though to prevent my escaping him.

"You're one of the lot that has brought me down," he growled. "How much is it, and how long has it been due?"

"It has been due a long time past," I replied; "and the amount is two shillings, for two bottles of medicine and advice."

"Are you sure it isn't more?"

"Quite sure. I should have paid you before to-day, but when I went to your place—a long while ago, I must tell you—I found you had gone. You practiced in the north of London, you know."

"I do know; I have reason to know. If I had got my rights I should not be as I am. I should be practicing in Belgravia, and driving in my carriage. I'll take another whisky." I nodded at the

barman, who refilled the glass, which he instantly emptied again. "What do we slave for? What do we study for? What do we waste the midnight oil for? To be taken in, to be robbed and swindled, to have promises made to us that are never fulfilled."

"Unfortunately," I said, sympathizing with him, "it is the way of the world. It is the simple-minded and the honest that are defrauded."

"You know how it is. Five shillings, you said."

"No; it is two shillings I owe you."

"Interest added, makes it three. You can't object to that."

"I don't object; here is the money."

He took it, and dropped it in his pocket. We had each of us only one disengaged hand, as he still kept hold of my wrist.

"A feeble pulse," he said, shaking his head with tipsy gravity, "a very feeble pulse. Needs a stimulant."

"Irish whisky?"

"Irish whisky," he echoed; and disposed of his fourth glass, while I spilled mine as I had done before.

These rapid potations had the effect I desired; they weakened his self-control, they loosened his tongue.

"That was an interesting discussion you were

having," I observed, "when I came in. What was it you said? That there are more ways than one of killing a man. How true that is! But it is only those who are experienced in such matters that can speak with authority. Do you suspect, doctor, that the woman is guilty?"

"I will take my oath she is guilty."

"But the fact of poison being administered was not absolutely established."

He snapped his fingers. "That for being established! There are poisons and poisons; there are way and ways. Did you ever take a sleeping draught?"

"Never."

"Well, when you want one, come to me, and I will give you something that will make you sleep so sound that you will never wake up again."

"Declined with thanks. But would it not be discovered?"

"It might or it mightn't. Suppose it is discovered that you died of an overdose. Then comes the question, who administered it? When a man suffers from insomnia he doses himself as a rule, and if he overdoes it he has only himself to blame. There's the bottle at his bedside empty. There are the people who are interested—generally two, a man and a woman. If there are servants in the

house they are asleep. What have they to do with it? The man, or the woman, does not wake up again. Now prove that the man, or the woman, who is left alive forced the sleeping draught down the other one's throat. You can't do it. I can tell you where you can buy some effervescent sleeping globules that you put in your mouth, and fall asleep while they are dissolving. One makes you sleep for six hours, two makes you sleep for ten hours, three makes you sleep for twenty, four makes you sleep forever. Some of us doctors have secrets that we keep to ourselves; make you as wise as we are, and where should we be? There was a case—I mention no names—of a man suffering under a painful disease which might run its course for months, perhaps years, before it prove fatal. Wife suggests that it would be a mercy to kill him, and so put him out of pain. A little syringe, a slight injection while the man is sleeping; it is done in a moment; the man is dead. The woman comes into a fortune, and marries her lover. Medical testimony, the disease from which the man has been suffering, and which *must* prove fatal some time or other. Quite natural. Everybody's happy, and nothing more is heard of the matter. There are other ways. Charcoal, which English people don't take to; escape of gas"—I

caught my breath, but fortunately my sudden spasm passed unnoticed—"quite as easy, quite as natural. For one murder discovered, how many undiscovered? Work that out!"

"An interesting study for statisticians," I said.

"If they had the facts before them; but they can't get hold of them. There are liquid poisons that can be mixed with food, and are tasteless and colorless; they can be administered for months, and nobody the wiser. You may find a trace in the body after death, but not sufficient to account for what has taken place, not a twentieth part sufficient to account for it. There are others to weaken not only the body but the mind, to destroy memory, to make one oblivious of the past. Perfectly pleasant and painless. Now, what do you think of a man who knows what I know being in such a position as I am."

"It is disgraceful," I said.

"It is infamous. You are struggling, you are poor, you have a large family, you are fond of the pleasures of life. A person—again I mention no names—comes to you, and says such and such a thing—never mind what thing. This person is rich; you are in debt. I am only supposing a case, you know."

"Of course."

"The person says, there's a sudden death in my house—an accident, say by charcoal, say by gas. A pure accident, most lamentable. A doctor's testimony is required, for formality's sake. Any doctor will do. You are in the neighborhood. Will you testify? Fee, so many guineas, and afterward a lift up in life, a chance to get along. As our national poet expresses it, 'My poverty, but not my will, consents.' You do no wrong; the person is a gentleman, and you take his word; you testify at the inquest, and all is smooth sailing. The affair is forgotten. You receive your few guineas, and you wait for the chance to get along in life, for the lift up that will bring you a lucrative practice. It never comes. The person shrugs his shoulders, contradicts you, jockeys you. What's the consequence? Your suspicions are excited. The person inherits a great sum of money by the death. You ferret that out; your suspicions grow stronger. You go to the person, and you mention your suspicions. He says, 'You are putting yourself in danger; if you have given false evidence, the law will make you suffer for it; you are a fool and a knave. Get out!' You are bound to submit. What are your feelings toward the person who has treated you so shamefully? What would you do him if it was in your power?"

"I would certainly—supposing this not to be a hypothetical case——"

"Which it is," interposed Dr. Cooper, "purely hypothetical."

"Exactly. How could it be otherwise? But such conversations are most interesting to an outsider like myself. Supposing then, this not to be a hypothetical case, I would certainly be glad of any chance to be even with the person who has imposed upon me. Carrying the hypothesis further, what should you say became of the body of the—did you say a lady?"

"No, I don't think I said a lady; but let it be a lady, for the sake of argument."

"What became of the body—though that's a stupid question, because, of course, it was buried in the usual way?"

"It might not have been. There's such a thing as cremation."

What turn the conversation would have taken after this startling observation it is out of my power to say, for the slatternly wife of the doctor made her appearance here, and told my tipsy companion that a patient required his immediate attention.

An hour afterward I was once more in Lamb's Terrace.

CHAPTER XXI.

BARBARA GIVES US SOME VALUABLE INFORMATION.

"WE thought you were lost," said Bob, and Barbara looked up with a smile, a sign that she regarded me as a friend.

They had waited dinner for me, and I was surprised to see on the table quite an imposing array of crockery.

"Where does all this come from?" I asked.

"We have made discoveries," replied Bob, giving me a significant look. "Barbara here had no idea what was in the house, which proves that she is not one of the prying kind. All sorts of things have been bundled out of sight in odd nooks and corners, crockery, cutlery, table linen, and goodness only knows what. We have made another room ready for Barbara to sleep in to-night; it is on the same floor as this, and she says she is not afraid."

"Not a bit," said Barbara, "now I aint in the 'ouse alone."

"And she's going to bed early," added Bob.

"As soon as ever you tell me," said Barbara.

The dinner they had prepared was not at all a bad one, and I was hungry enough to enjoy a much worse fare. To Barbara it was a veritable feast, and she did as much justice to it as she had done to the breakfast. The moment we finished she jumped up, and took the plates and dishes to her own room where she washed them up.

"You have something to tell me, Bob," I said, taking advantage of her absence.

"I have. You have something in your budget, too."

"Yes."

"We will wait till Barbara has gone to bed; we can talk more freely then."

"I have a question to ask her first," I said.

"I also want a little information from her, the meaning of which you will understand when we are alone for the night." The little girl entering at this moment, Bob turned his attention to her. "Barbara, was your sister fond of dress?"

"Lor', sir," answered Barbara. "Aint all gals fond of it? She used to say if she was a lady she'd allus dress in silk."

"Do you recollect what frock she wore when you saw her last?"

"It was a cotton frock, sir—pink, with little flowers on it. Miss Beatrice give it to 'er."

"You would know it again, I suppose, if you saw it?"

"In course I should know it, sir, 'cause Molly 'd be in it."

"But it would be worn out by this time, Barbara."

"Yes, sir, it would. I didn't think of that."

"Do you recollect the dress that Miss Beatrice wore when you saw her last?"

"I should think I do, sir; it *was* a beauty. A gray silk, it wos, with steel trimmin's. She looked lovely in it, she did."

Bob conveyed in a glance at me that he had no further questions to ask, and I took up the cue.

"You have a good memory, Barbara, and I dare say you can give me a description of Mr. Nisbet. You told us he was not a nice looking gentleman."

"Not at all, sir, though he did 'ave a 'igh fore-'ead. 'E 'ad a look like ice in his eyes."

"What color were they?"

"A kind of cold blue; and 'e 'ad a red beard and mustache."

"A tall gentleman, Barbara?"

"Yes, sir. 'E didn't have no 'at on when 'e came into the kitching, and I sor that 'is 'ead wos bald in

the middle, and was flattish at the top. As 'e looked round the kitching 'e put a pair of gold spectacles on, and when they wosn't on 'is eye 'e was allus a-dangling 'em with 'is fingers, twiddling 'em about like."

"You don't seem to have liked his looks?"

"I didn't, sir; there was something about 'im that made my 'eart's blood run cold. I pitied Miss Beatrice, I did."

"For any particular reason, Barbara?"

"Not as I knows on, sir, but I thought to myself, 'I shouldn't like to 'ave a father like that; I'd rather 'ave none at all.'"

"What did your sister Molly think of him?"

"She didn't care for 'im no more than I did, but she didn't say much about 'im. It's my belief she wos frightened of 'im. She told me a funny thing once."

"Yes?"

"She sed that sometimes when he looked at 'er she felt as if she couldn't move or speak of her own accord. 'Barbara,' she sed to me, 'it's my opinion that if 'e ordered me to go up to the roof and stand on the top of one of the chimbley pots I should go and do it without a single word.' But he allus spoke soft to 'er, she sed."

"Thank you, Barbara; and now it will be best for

you to get to bed. Last night was a broken night, and you must be tired."

Wishing us good-night the girl went to her room, and when I opened her door a few minutes afterward she was fast asleep.

Then, before asking Bob to speak of what was on his mind, I related my own adventures. He was greatly excited at my description of Dr. Cooper and the supposititious case he had put to me, and also at the news of Mr. Oliver Nisbet being in London.

"There's never smoke without a fire," he said. "Dr. Cooper was not drawing upon his imagination when he spoke about poisons and sleeping draughts, and of a poor doctor being called in to testify to a death of which he knew less than nothing. It happened, Ned! it happened; it fits in with what occurred in this house. He supplied the proof in the last words he spoke to you—'there's such a thing as cremation.' It is as clear as the noonday sun. Mr. Nisbet wanted a doctor's certificate of death; he calls in Dr. Cooper and obtains what he requires, in the exact shape he desires, for the payment of a few guineas and the promise of a further reward which has never been fulfilled. What is the consequence? This wretched pettifogger bears an animosity against his employer, which may perhaps

be turned to good account—though whether he babbles when sober as he does when he is in his cups remains to be seen. He must not be lost sight of."

"He shall not be. I am thinking whether it will be advisable to put the inquiry agent on his track."

"We can decide nothing as yet, but the thing is moving, that's one comfort. Every day, almost every hour, some new feature seems to come to light. What are you doing?"

"Writing the description of Mr. Nisbet's personal appearance with which Barbara supplied us. I promised to let Mr. Dickson have it as soon as possible, and I shall post it to him to-night. Now for your news, Bob."

"Almost as important as yours. When you left us I commenced to make a thorough examination of the house, as I said I would. Barbara assisted me. I examined every room, every cupboard, and found a lot of things which had apparently been thrown away in haste. These discoveries gave point to an observation I have already made to you —that it is strange the last tenant did not call in a broker and dispose of articles for which he had no use, as he evidently had no intention of occupying the house. Barbara was much surprised at our discoveries, and I shouldn't wonder, honest as I

believe the child to be, if the idea occurred to her that she might have made use of the property from time to time to relieve her poverty. However, that is neither here nor there, and I may be doing Barbara an injustice. We had occupied some time in our search, when it became necessary to devote attention to the preparation of dinner, so I sent the girl away, and continued to poke about alone. It was well I did so, for I made what I conceive to be a startling discovery. On the floor above this there are two attics, presumably intended for servants' bedrooms. There is a rather large landing, and in the wall of this landing I observed two low doors. Opening them, I found that they were cupboards for the receptacle of lumber; they extend far into the outer wall of the house. It was in one of these cupboards, at the extreme end, that I made my startling discovery. What kind of dress did Barbara say that Miss Beatrice wore when she last saw her?"

"A gray silk, with steel trimmings."

Bob went to a corner of the room and brought forward a large bundle.

"Here it is."

There it was, sure enough—a very beautiful dress, perfectly made, of expensive material.

"Observe," said Bob, "this is not a dress which

has served its day, and which it is at all probable the wearer voluntarily discarded. It is almost new, and could have been worn but a few times. I put this aside, and I produce every other article of a lady's attire—silk stockings, shoes, petticoats, mantle, hat. I produce also a lady's nightdress, and every other requisite—the outfit is complete. All these articles are in good condition; the stockings show no signs of wear, the shoes are nearly new, the mantle must have cost a fair sum of money. To whom did these clothes belong?"

"To Miss Beatrice."

"Yes, to Miss Beatrice. What did Barbara say was her sister's favorite dress?"

"A pink cotton, with little flowers on it."

"Here it is." He produced it. "And also every other article worn by a young woman in Molly's station in life. Nightdress as well. The two outfits, complete in every particular. Now, a singular feature in this discovery is that these things were not thrust hurriedly and hastily into the cupboard. Each article that could be folded was carefully folded, and each costume was carefully packed and wrapped in thick brown paper. Time and attention has been devoted to the task, and there must have been an underlying motive in the care that was exercised in its accomplishment. What was

this motive, and how are we to act? My firm opinion is that Mr. Nisbet's hands are responsible for the packing of these clothes. Ordinarily a man could be careless of such things, and would not waste his time upon them. The conjectures that present themselves are so extraordinary that I cannot reduce them to order or reason, but I have an odd conviction—for which I can give you no explanation—that we are on the threshold of further disclosures. What is the next step, Ned?"

"There are several," I replied, "and we will speak of them. First, let me tell you that it is my intention to keep watch on this house."

"To reside here?"

"For a time. To eat, and drink, and sleep here, and to be absent from the house as little as possible."

Bob interrupted me by asking if the apparition of the cat was in the room.

"It is on the hearthrug," I replied, "seemingly waiting, as we are waiting, for developments." Then I continued speaking of the realities of the position. "I suppose it would be too much to ask you to keep me company here this week, after your office work is over?"

"It is not too much to expect; I should have

proposed it myself if you had not suggested it. Every evening, directly my work is done, I will come and join you."

"You are a good fellow. I intend to be very careful in my movements, and, so far as possible, not to let it be known that the house is occupied. I do not wish Barbara to remain. We must find a home for her somewhere, and we must pledge her to secrecy. I would take her to my own house, but at present I do not consider it prudent to do so. My wife is an inquisitive woman, and something might leak out; besides, in order that my time may be perfectly free, I intend to send her into the country for a fortnight; she shall go to-morrow. I can easily find an excuse for not accompanying her. You lodge in a quiet part of London, and you have spoken in praise of your landlady. Would she, for a consideration, give Barbara board and lodging for a little while?"

"No doubt she would. In fact, I think she is looking for a girl to assist her in the house."

"Very well. At what hour in the morning are you due at your office?"

"Half-past nine."

"Then you will be able, if you leave here at about seven or half-past, to take Barbara to Canonbury, and get to the office in time."

"Yes, I can do that, and in the evening I will join you."

"Thanks. The next thing is about your nephew, Ronald. It appears to me to be almost an act of treachery to conceal from him what has occurred."

"What good purpose would be served," asked Bob, "by disclosing it to him? He is blind, and could not assist us. By and by, perhaps, he may be of use, though I do not see in what way; at present it would only distress him to let him into the secret."

"We will wait, then; but I shall call upon him to-morrow and have a little chat with him about Mr. Nisbet. It will be a busy day for all of us, and I shall be absent from the house till evening, but you will find me here when you come. Another thing that is in my mind is whether there is any special motive for Mr. Nisbet's return to London—any special motive, I mean, in relation to this mystery."

"Impossible to say, Ned."

"That is so. Well, we must wait. Now I think we have threshed matters out, and we will get to bed. I will just run out and post my letter to Mr. Dickson, and this exciting day's work will be over."

We were all up next morning before seven

o'clock, and after a hasty breakfast I told Barbara of our plans with respect to her. She was quite willing, and expressed her gratitude; her only trouble was about her sister Molly, who, she said, might come to the house in search for her when she was absent. It was not difficult to set her mind at ease upon this point, and she departed with Bob in perfect contentment.

The first call I made—at ten o'clock—was upon Mr. Dickson. He had received my letter, and he informed me that the description I had given of Mr. Oliver Nisbet tallied exactly with that gentleman's appearance. He had not ascertained from what part of the Continent Mr. Nisbet had come, but he had learned that he had been abroad for some time past. Our relations with each other being now on a more confidential footing, I spoke to him about Dr. Cooper, and instructed him to keep his eye on the pettifogger. From his office I proceeded to the residence of Ronald Elsdale, and opened up a conversation with him, leading artfully to the subject upon which I desired information.

"From certain events that have transpired lately," I said, "I am curious to learn something more of his character. Were you aware at the time of your intimacy with him that his stepdaughter was heiress to a large fortune?"

No, he answered, he was not aware of it. From the manner in which they traveled he judged Mr. Nisbet to be a man of means, but he knew nothing further.

"Respecting his acquirements," I said. "Was he of a scientific turn of mind?"

"He was fond of chemistry, I believe," said Ronald, "and of experimentalizing. Your question brings to my mind a conversation which took place at *table d'hôte* when we were in Chamounix. It was on the subject of anæsthetics, and the effect of certain poisonous chemicals upon different temperaments. I fancy that Mr. Nisbet was at first disinclined to take part in the discussion, but a remark escaped him which was disputed by a person at the table, and he grew warm, and spoke with authority upon the subject, with which he was evidently familiar. It was the only occasion upon which I heard him speak freely, and I think he was not pleased at having been drawn into the conversation, for he stopped suddenly in the middle of a sentence, and left the room. Beatrice told me afterward that he was very clever in those matters, and that on occasions when she had passed a sleepless night from toothache or some other ailment, he had given her a draught which produced a good night's rest. I recollect now that she related an

incident which strangely interested me. She had been restless and in pain for two or three days, and her stepfather prescribed for her. When she awoke in the morning her pain had passed away, and she was quite well physically, but a singular thing happened to her. She had lost her memory. She could not recall what happened yesterday or the day before, and she said with a smile that it was with difficulty she remembered her name. Gradually her power of memory came back to her, and she recollected everything perfectly."

"Did this occur to her again, Mr. Elsdale?"

"So far as I know it occurred only once. I suppose you will not tell me why you are asking these questions, Mr. Emery?"

"Not yet; and I am going to ask you two more. Do you believe that you will ever see the young lady again?"

"See her? No. How can I? You forget that I am blind. But I have the firmest belief that I shall come into association with her again."

"In life?"

"In life," he replied gravely.

"My other question is this. On former occasions, when we were in each other's company, your uncle being present, you have had an impression that there was a dog, or some other living creature,

in the room. Have you such an impression now?"

"No." (I may mention that the apparition of the cat was not visible to me.) "I know, Mr. Emery, that you must think I am laboring under some hallucination, but I cannot help that. You must take me as you find me, and make the best, and not the worst, of me. I have an engagement with a pupil, and you will excuse me now."

I had studied the time-tables, and, it being twelve o'clock, it was safe for me to present myself to my poor deluded wife. On my way home I met with another adventure. There was a block of vehicles in the road, and cabs, omnibuses, and carts were waiting for the policeman's instruction to proceed. In one of these cabs, a hansom, a gentleman was sitting whom I immediately recognized as Mr. Oliver Nisbet. He had a red beard and mustache, he had a high forehead, his eyes were of a cold blue, and he was impatiently dangling a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses between his fingers. The faithfulness of Barbara's description rather startled me, and I should scarcely have been surprised if he had accosted me. But I was a stranger to him, and he took no notice of me; this gave me the opportunity of observing him closely, and I was confident that I was not mistaken. What particularly struck

me was the steely blue of his eyes; there seemed to be a compelling power in them which strangely affected me, and I could not help thinking that I should not relish coming under their influence. The policeman stood aside, and the vehicles passed on. In a moment or two he was out of sight.

My wife opened the door for me, and kissed me affectionately.

"Have you enjoyed yourself?" she asked.

"Immensely," I replied, with a guilty feeling.

"I am glad to hear it," was her response, "though I must say, Edward, you don't look much the better for the trip."

"That is only your fancy, Maria. It has done me so much good that I want you to spend a couple of weeks in Brighton."

"I shall be very glad of the change. When shall we start?"

"I cannot go with you," I said, "as I have business to attend to in London. You can easily get a lady friend to accompany you, and I will be responsible for all the expenses. Maria, I insist upon it. You are pale, you are out of sorts, and the change will set you up. I intend to exercise my authority, and to insist upon it."

"You are very kind; but——"

"I will have no 'buts.' It has to be done, and done it shall be."

And I was so determined that done it was. I did not leave home till I had seen Maria and a lady friend off; then, and then only, did I look upon myself as free. If the necessity arose I could easily keep her away for a longer time than two weeks.

Once more I set my face toward Lamb's Terrace, riding in a cab, and furnished with provisions, in the shape of a cooked ham, a supply of chops, bread, butter, tea, and everything that was necessary to victual the garrison. I took the things with me in a hamper, and at the corner of the desolate thoroughfare I discharged the cab, and carried the hamper to the house.

It is necessary here to mention what I did before I left the house in the morning. I can give no reason for my proceedings, and therefore I must content myself with relating what it was I did. The two dresses found in the attic cupboard I repacked carefully in their wrapping of brown paper, and replaced them in the cupboard. I locked the two rooms which had been occupied by Bob and me and Barbara, and I removed all traces of any persons having been in the house. Again, I say, I do not know why I adopted these apparently

unnecessary precautions; I must have been mysteriously prompted, as I had been on other occasions in the course of my strange adventures.

I did not expect Bob for an hour, and I busied myself with arranging the supply of food I had brought with me. Then I went to the attic cupboard, with the intention of bringing down the women's garments I had discovered there. To my astonishment they were gone. Some person had been in the house during my absence, and had taken them away.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. NISBET VISITS LAMB'S TERRACE.

I HAD no doubt whatever that this person was Mr. Oliver Nisbet, who must have in his possession the means of access to the house. This being the case, the question of motive arose. It could not have been the value of the garments, which, to a man of fortune, was of small importance. The care which in the first instance had been taken to conceal them became now in my judgment of extreme significance; still more so the stealthy manner in which they had been removed. Mr. Nisbet had been in London comparatively but a few hours before he carried out a design the probable intention of which was to remove and destroy evidence which might in some way place him in peril. Likely enough he had come to London for this special purpose, fearing, as he was no longer the tenant, that the house would be let to strangers, into whose hands the clothing would naturally fall. Surely he would not have paid his stealthy visit to Lamb's Terrace if he had not cause to dread exposure!

Bob, who presented himself punctually at the time he named, agreed with me in this view, and when I told him of my coming by chance upon Mr. Nisbet, and spoke of the impression he produced upon me, he looked disturbed. I asked the reason, and he answered:

"Well, Ned, I don't mind confessing to you that I have a secret horror of Mr. Nisbet, and an unreasonable dread of him. I hardly think we two would be a match for him."

I could not help smiling as I remarked, "There is not much chance of a personal encounter, Bob."

"I am not so sure of that," he said. "I am not so sure that he is not at this moment concealed in the house, the ins and outs of which he must be much better acquainted with than we are."

"Concealed for the purpose of doing us an injury?" I inquired.

"Concealed," he replied, "first to ascertain if any persons were in occupation and had any suspicions of the last tenant—in which case he would in all probability endeavor to get rid of those persons as he got rid of his unfortunate stepdaughter."

"You forget, Bob, the gas is cut off."

"Ned," said Bob impressively, "my firm belief is that the young lady did not meet her death by asphyxiation caused by an escape of gas. True,

we have no evidence of a crime having been committed; our suspicions go for nothing; your apparition of the cat goes for nothing; a third-rate lawyer would laugh them to scorn; but none the less do I believe that the lady my nephew loved was murdered by her stepfather. Your interview with Dr. Cooper strengthens these suspicions, the removal of the women's clothing confirms them in my mind. And still, legally, we are no further advanced. Everything in this house belongs to the last tenant. He paid the rent regularly while he held the lease, and if he chose to leave his property here unprotected, it was his affair; and if, after a long absence from England, he returns and pays an early visit to the house, which is still practically without a tenant, for the purpose of taking possession of part of his property, he is still fairly within his right. Even supposing that there were a law to touch him—which there is not—he could easily explain the matter, and his explanation would be accepted without question."

"Unless," I interposed, "we stepped forward with what we know."

"We know nothing, Ned, absolutely nothing. We should only bring ourselves into trouble, lay ourselves open to a criminal action for defamation, which the most skillful lawyer in the land could not

successfully defend. What do you think I have done to-day?"

"I have not the least idea."

"I asked my employer for a holiday, and I have got it. I have been slaving in his office for years without a single week's vacation. He gave me the holiday, three or four weeks, at my option, and I intend to employ the time in remaining with you and assisting in the elucidation of this mystery, if it is ever to be arrived at."

"You are a real friend; but, Bob, that is a nice idea of a holiday, after years of hard work."

"Never mind. The mystery has got tight hold of me, and I don't mean to leave it unless I am compelled by circumstances to do so. You have no objection to company and assistance, I suppose?"

"I am truly grateful for it."

"You see," said Bob earnestly, "I happen to be more closely connected with it than you are. You have no human relation with the parties in the affair, who, until quite lately, were complete strangers to you. I have some sort of connection with them through my nephew Ronald, whom I have seen to-day, and who, I may tell you, is troubled by the inquiries you have made of him. He has no notion of their tendency, but he felt that some-

thing is being concealed from him which he has a right to know. It is in his interests, and for his satisfaction, that I enter into a direct partnership with you. Have you succeeded in persuading your good wife to go to the seaside?"

"I have, and she will be away for at least for a fortnight; if necessary I shall insist upon her remaining at Brighton for a longer time."

"So that we are free to set actively to work without interruption."

"Yes, Bob. How about Barbara?"

"My landlady takes her upon trial. There will be no charge for board and lodging, and if she gives satisfaction she will get a shilling a week to commence with."

"I am glad to hear it. And now to get back to your suspicions that Mr. Nisbet may be concealed in the house even while we are talking. He might endeavor to get rid of us, you said. When, and how?"

"When? In the dead of night, when we are sound asleep. How? Well, I put together these facts: Mr. Nisbet's knowledge of dangerous chemicals, the narcotic which Ronald informed you he gave to his stepdaughter, and the significant conclusions which can be drawn from your conversation with Dr. Cooper. I propose, not this evening,

to-morrow morning, that you, or we together, pay a visit to Dr. Cooper, and have an interview with him. He has a grievance against Mr. Nisbet; it might be turned to effect."

"You suspect him of being an accomplice?"

"In a certain sense. What do they call it in law? Accessory after the fact. He might have known nothing at the time; the belief that his knowledge of poisonous narcotics—bear in mind his boast—had been used to a bad end may have come afterward."

"But if he makes any admission it could be used against himself."

"It could, but he may be able to prove his innocence of a guilty intention. However, that is a point for future consideration. A visit can do no harm. He is desperately poor, and a little bribe may tempt him; if we cannot worm anything out of him, we may out of his wife. Now, Ned, before I consent to sleep in this house I intend to search it thoroughly from roof to cellar."

We carried out this proposal; we thoroughly examined every room, we made fast every door when we closed it behind us; and we discovered nothing. Our search over, we were quite convinced that we were the only persons in the house.

The following two hours were devoted to prepar-

ing supper, and while we were thus employed we discussed our movements for to-morrow. Bob insisted that Ronald Elsdale should be made acquainted with all that had transpired, and I consented. Our first visit in the morning was to be paid to the inquiry agent, our second to Dr. Cooper, our third to Ronald. Bob was thoroughly in earnest, and I perceived that his interest in the matter was now no less than my own.

I have already stated that the room we had selected was on the second floor, and that its windows faced the back garden. There were Venetian blinds to the window, and some of the slats were awry and loose from long neglect. For a reason which he did not explain Bob shaded the one candle which we had lighted, so that the fact of the apartment being occupied could not be quite clearly established from without. Several times Bob went to the window and cautiously peeped through the crooked slats.

"What for, Bob?" I asked.

"Just a fancy of mine," he replied. "Is your apparition present?"

"It is not."

The weather had suddenly changed, in fit accordance with the extraordinary vagaries of our beautiful climate. A fine night had set in, and there was

a full bright moon. In the middle of a game of cribbage Bob rose once more, and stepped to the window and remained there.

"Don't touch the candle, Ned," he said, "and move cautiously. Come here quietly, so as not to give an observer outside any indication that human beings are in the room."

I obeyed him, and presently was standing motionless by his side, peeping through the slats.

The garden was bathed in light. Standing in full view I saw a man facing our window, his eyes intently fixed in our direction in the endeavor to discover whether the apartment was inhabited.

"Can you see him plainly?'

"Quite plainly, Bob."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Oliver Nisbet."

"Ah!"

And now a strange incident occurred, visible to me, but not to Bob. In the clear moonlight I saw the skeleton cat creeping toward the man who was watching. Slowly it advanced and fastened itself upon him, and climbed upward till it reached his shoulder. And there it squatted, its yellow eyes resting ominously on Mr. Nisbet's face. He seemed to be perfectly unconscious of the presence of the apparition, but to me it was an unmistakable

sign, more powerful than the strongest human proof, that the man had been guilty of a horrible crime. In silence we stood at the window for several minutes, and then Mr. Nisbet slunk away to the rear of the garden. He climbed the crumbling wall which encompassed it, and was gone.

"What do you say to that, Ned?" asked Bob.

I could not answer, so enthralled was I by the spiritual evidence of guilt of which I had been a witness. Bob looked at me inquiringly.

"Your face is as white as death," he said. "Are you ill?"

"A moment, Bob," I replied; and when I was sufficiently recovered I explained to him what I had seen. It stirred him as deeply as it had stirred me.

"If a shadow of doubt was in my mind," he said, "it is dispelled. The villain must be brought to justice."

"He shall be, if human effort can accomplish it. I will not rest till his guilt is brought home to him."

We slept but little that night, and did not take our rest together. Fearful of consequences to which we could give no name, we slept and watched in turn, Bob's pistol being handy for any emergency. Nothing further, however, occurred to

disturb us. Early in the morning we breakfasted, and took our way to Mr. Dickson's office.

"You received my message, then?" were his first words to me.

"What message?" I inquired.

"The one I sent to your house an hour ago. I knew it was safe to leave it, because your wife was in the country. Oh, we find out things without being told. It belongs to our business."

"I did not sleep at home last night; I received no message."

"It does not matter, now you are here. I have news for you. Yesterday Mr. Oliver Nisbet paid two visits to the house in Lamb's Terrace."

"You discovered that, did you?"

"I should be a bungler if I had not. We have never left him, and I will stake all I am worth that he had not the slightest suspicion that he was being watched. His first visit was made at two o'clock. He let himself into the house with a key, and remained there about an hour. He went in with his hands empty; he came out with his hands full. He carried a large parcel with him wrapped in brown paper, and this evidently was the motive for his first visit. We do not know what was in the parcel; he took it to his room in the Métropole, and left it there. His second visit was paid in the

night, at half-past nine. He did not enter by the front door; indeed, he did not enter at all. He climbed over the back wall of the garden, and stood there, watching the back windows, for half an hour or so. Then he returned the same way as he came. From Lamb's Terrace he went to Theobald's Row, South Lambeth, and had an interview with a disreputable apothecary there of the name of Cooper. He calls himself a doctor, but I doubt whether he has a diploma. From Theobald's Row, Mr. Nisbet returned to the Métropole, and left instructions to be called early. If you went to the hotel now you would not find him there."

"He has fled!" I exclaimed.

"I do not know about that," said Mr. Dickson, with a smile. "We will call it a departure. He has taken his departure."

"Gone to another hotel?"

"Not in this country. He left for the Continent this morning by the early train."

I stamped my foot impatiently. "Then he has escaped us!" I cried.

"He has not gone alone," said Mr. Dickson calmly. "One of my officers went by the same train. I am right in my understanding that you do not mind a little extra expense?"

"Quite right."

"The question of expense is frequently a puzzling matter with us, movements requiring an unauthorized expenditure of money sometimes occurring suddenly, when there is not time to consult our clients. If I had allowed Mr. Nisbet to leave the country unaccompanied he might have slipped through your fingers; in any event it would have been a great trouble, and have necessitated the expenditure of much more money, to pick up the broken threads. Many a good case has been spoiled by parsimony."

"I understand that. Where has Mr. Nisbet gone to?"

"I cannot inform you yet. As far as Paris, certainly; but my impression is he goes farther. My officer will telegraph me from Paris, and will not leave him till he has reached his destination."

I considered a moment, and then took Bob aside. "Will you accompany me to Paris?" I asked.

"With pleasure."

I turned to Mr. Dickson. "Your officer will telegraph to you from Paris?"

"Yes."

"If I wait here for information I shall lose a day. You could telegraph to me in Paris the address you receive from your officer?"

"There is no difficulty. You intend to follow?"

"I do. Give me the name of some central hotel in Paris where I can put up till I receive your telegram."

"Hôtel de Bade, Boulevard des Italiens."

"That will do. I have something to do here in London before I can start. I can get through my business in about an hour, perhaps a few minutes more. Bob, run out and bring two hansoms with smart horses." Bob vanished. "Now, the best train, Mr. Dickson?"

"Let me see. It is not yet nine. Your business say an hour and twenty minutes. A train from Victoria, another from Charing Cross, at eleven. Could you catch one of these, whichever is the nearest for you?"

"Yes."

"You arrive in Paris at seven this evening. Our man will reach there two hours and a half earlier. You may get a telgram from me at the Hôtel de Bade within an hour or so of your arrival."

"Capital. Good-morning."

The cabs were at the door, and I told Bob to drive with speed to my house, to pack up a bag for both of us expeditiously, and to meet me at Ronald Elsdale's house at a little after ten. The cab was to remain there, and he was to detain his nephew till I joined him there. Pending my ar-

rival he was to tell Ronald everything. I gave him a line to my servant, authorizing him to take what clothes were necessary for the journey.

"Double fare," I said to both the cabmen, "if you drive at your fullest speed."

The next moment Bob was driving to my house and I was on my way to Dr. Cooper.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE TRACK.

THEOBALD'S ROW was as depressing in the morning as it had been in the evening, and looked as if a bath would do it good. The workingmen's lodging houses bore even a more striking resemblance to prisons, and the men and women I passed looked as if they had been up all night, and had hurried out to their depressing occupations without having had recourse to soap and water. On the doorstep of Dr. Cooper's shop the same half dozen children were playing the same games with pieces of broken crockery and dry mud, and bore no appearance of having been washed since I last set eyes on them. One of the children, catching sight of me, jumped up and ran into the shop, screaming:

"Here's the gentleman, mother!" At which summons the slatternly woman immediately presented herself. It struck me that there was something aggressive in her aspect.

"Oh," she said, in no amiable tone, "it's you!"

"Yes," I replied, "it is I."

"And you call yourself a workingman," she exclaimed.

"I am not aware that I have done so."

"So my husband told me last night; you are the man who called last night, and went to seek my husband at the Britannia. Don't deny it."

"I have not the least intention of doing so. You gave me the information where to see him."

"So I did, and he said you pretended to be a workingman. Now, a workingman wouldn't say, 'it is I'; he'd say 'it's me.' I have been brought pretty low, but I had fair schooling when I was young, and I know a workingman from a gentleman."

"Well," I observed, "say that I am a gentleman; is that anything against me?"

"It is everything against you. I heard from my husband all that passed between you—as nearly as he could remember, in the state he was. When he's in his cups his tongue runs too free, and you gave him rope enough. Perhaps you're not a gentleman, after all. What do you say to detective?"

"I am not a detective," I answered, with, I confess, a rather guilty feeling, for if I was not doing the work of a detective, what else was I doing? "For what reason on earth should a detective be running after your husband?"

"An admission!" she cried, and I saw that I had to do with a sharp woman. "Then you *are* running after him." She folded her arms defiantly. "Now, what for?"

I smiled rather feebly as I said, "You would not believe me if I told you I have come to put something in his way."

"You are right there. I should not believe you."

"But it is the truth, nevertheless, and it will not serve me to talk it over with you. Can I see your husband?"

"You cannot see him."

"Is he not at home?"

"He is not at home."

"Will he be in soon?"

"He will not be in soon."

There was no mistaking her meaning; she regarded me as an enemy, and it was her intention to be personally offensive.

"You do not wish me and your husband to meet?"

"You shan't meet if I can help it."

"Then you must have something to fear."

This thrust, which I gave involuntarily—for I had no desire to hurt the poor woman's feelings—drove the color from her face. She retreated a step, and stumbled over a child that was playing on

the floor. The slight accident seemed to infuriate her; she angrily pushed the child away with her foot, and turned upon me like a tigress.

"What are you hunting us down for?" she cried. "Do you think I have not had trouble enough in my life? Driven here and there, with a pack of hungry children in rags, and tied to a man who expects me to keep a home and a family upon ten shillings a week! But he's my husband for all that, and I'm not going to help you bring a deeper disgrace upon us. You came here yesterday to set a trap for him, with a lying story that you owed him a few pence which you were anxious to pay. God knows what you wormed out of him, for, clever as he is, he's a fool when he pours the drink down his throat. I've warned him over and over again to be careful what he says; but I might as well have talked to a stone. He's out of your reach now, at all events, and you'll have a job to find him. I wish you joy of your task, you cowardly sneak!"

The passion of her defiance of me was wonderful to witness; but underlying this defiance was a terror which did not escape my observation.

"I came here," I said gently, for her despair and her poverty inspired me with genuine pity, "in the hope that he would assist me in the discovery of a crime which has not been brought to light. If he

is not implicated in it he would have earned a few pounds; if in any way he is involved in it, all I can say is, Heaven pity him—and you!"

My time was too precious to waste further words upon her, and I left the shop, and entered the cab which was waiting for me. Before I could close the door a man accosted me.

"I heard what passed inside the shop," he said. "Make it worth my while, and I'll tell you something about Dr. Cooper."

"Jump in," I answered; "I have no time to stop talking here." I gave the driver Ronald Elsdale's address, and we sped thitherward. "Now, what have you to say?"

"You want to know where the doctor is?" he commenced.

"I do."

"Well, I can't tell you that exactly, but I can put you on his track. It's worth, I should say,"—he deliberated, and looked at me covertly to decide what he would be likely to screw out of me—"not less than half a crown."

"I will give you that if you keep nothing back."

"All right. Where's the coin?"

"No, my friend," I said, "I'll have the goods before I pay for them."

"You're a sharp old file, but I'm out of work;

it's capital and labor, and we know who's the grinder. Here was I, at six this morning, looking for work and not getting it. The doctor's shop shut, it's not the likes of him that catches worms. Back I come home at a quarter past seven, and there's a telegraph boy banging at the doctor's door. I help him bang, and out comes the doctor, doing up his buttons; takes the telegram, reads it, turns red and white, rushes into the house, rushes out in a brace of shakes, and scuds off. 'What's up?' thinks I, and off I scuds after him; he's too excited to notice. At St. George's Hospital, walking up and down in a fume, and looking as if he'd knock everything and everybody into a cocked hat if he had his way, there's a gentleman waiting for him, and a four-wheeler, with trunks atop, waiting for both of 'em. They have a hurried talk; I'm not near enough to hear what passes, but I get up to the cab as they step in. 'Charing Cross Station,' cries the gentleman to cabby. 'Break your horse's neck if you like; if I don't catch the Continental train I'll break yours.' Off goes the cab, and then, what do you think? off goes another cab that I hadn't noticed, after the first. I've got no money to pay for cabs, but having nothing better to do, and looking upon the move as a rum sort of move, I foots it to the station, and gets there at

five minutes to eight. There they are, Dr. Cooper and his gentleman friend, as busy as bees, and there's the bell ringing and porters shouting, and everything hurry scurry. Away they go through the gate, and off goes the train; and if all that aint worth half a dollar I'd like to know what is."

"You shall have the money," I said; "are you sure they both went away in the train?"

"I'm sure they didn't come back. I asked one of the porters what train that was. 'Train for Paris,' he said."

"Did you see the man who went after them in the second cab?"

"Never caught sight of him in the cab or out of it."

"But you saw the gentleman who met Dr. Cooper at the hospital."

"Of course I did."

"Was there anything peculiar in his appearance that you noticed particularly?"

"I noticed he had a red beard and mustache."

"Did he wear spectacles?"

"He had a pair of gold eyeglasses that he was continually putting on and off."

"You have earned the money. Here it is."

He took the half crown, bawled to the driver to stop, jumped out of the cab, and was off.

At five minutes past ten my cab drew up at Ronald Elsdale's house. Bob had been expeditious, and was there before me; he had even found time to tell Ronald everything. He informed me of this as he himself admitted me into the house.

"How did he take it?" I inquired.

"Very quietly," Bob answered. "He did not interrupt me once, nor did he ask a single question. When I finished he said, 'I must write letters to my pupils, telling them that there must be an unavoidable interruption in their lessons for a short time——'"

I did not follow Ronald's excellent example of listening quietly, but interrupted Bob excitedly. "For what reason?" I asked.

"He intends to accompany us. I did not argue with him. When my nephew makes up his mind to a thing he is not to be turned from it. His mother is packing his bag now. I had no difficulty at your house. The maid showed me where your clothes were, and I bundled a lot of them into the Gladstone. Here is Ronald. Don't oppose him; it will be quite useless."

"Good-morning, Mr. Emery," said the young man. "My uncle has related to me all the particulars of this strange affair, which we have not time

to talk over now. You have heard of my intention to accompany you."

"Yes."

"I have taken it upon myself to send to my uncle's house for the poor child, Barbara, and she will go with us, too. She has no clothes for such a trip, I understand, but my mother has found a few things that will do for her, and when we are in Paris we can buy whatever else she requires. She will not be an additional expense to you; I will pay for her."

"We can arrange that when we are on the road," I said, somewhat amazed at this unexpected addition to our party. "Do you really consider it necessary that she should accompany us?"

"Otherwise," he replied, "I should not have ventured to send for her. Mr. Emery, we must not allow a chance to escape us; we must take advantage of everything that suggests or presents itself that is likely to assist us. I am blind; if Mr. Nisbet stood before me I should not know it. My uncle has not seen him; you are under the impression that you would be certain to recognize him, but there are thousands of men with red hair and gold eyeglasses. The only one of us who can be positive is Barbara."

I saw that he was resolved, and that it would be

useless to remonstrate. What struck me, also, was that he seemed already to have assumed the command of the expedition, and to have placed himself at the head of it. Undoubtedly he had the right to take the initiative, for if a foul deed had been committed it was the lady he loved who had been the victim.

"Mr. Elsdale," I said, "I am satisfied with what you have done."

"Thank you, Mr. Emery," was his response. "There is here a mystery to be solved, a horrible wrong to be righted, a criminal to be brought to the bar of justice. I do not pretend to say that in so short a time I have reduced to order the terrible suggestions and possibilities that have presented themselves to my mind, but a man's duty is before me, and I will perform it faithfully and inexorably. Mere worldly considerations do not weigh in the scale. Though I lived to be an old man with this mystery still unsolved, I would not relinquish it. I will pursue it unflinchingly to the end, if I walk the earth barefoot. To you has come a spiritual sign and a spiritual mandate, and, through you, it has come to me." He drew me aside. "Is the apparition that first appeared to you in that ill-fated house visible to you? Is it here with us in the room?"

"It is not."

"It will appear again; be sure that it will appear again; and when justice is satisfied it will disappear, and you will no longer be troubled by it." He turned to Bob, and included him in the conversation. "Another reason why it is necessary and right that the little girl, Barbara, should accompany us is that we go not only to seek Mr. Nisbet, but to seek her sister. The young woman may have fallen under the spell of Mr. Nisbet's evil influence; he may have made her his slave. If that is the case, the efforts of strangers like ourselves to enlist her on our side would be futile; the love she bore her sister may help us here."

"You have entirely convinced me, Mr. Elsdale," I said, honestly and sincerely. "Little Barbara's aid may be invaluable to us."

As I made this remark the child knocked at the door, and as the maid-servant admitted her, Ronald's mother entered the room and said that all was ready. I looked at my watch.

"We have barely time to catch the eleven o'clock train," I said.

"Wot d'yer want of me, sir?" asked Barbara, whose appearance denoted that she had been summoned from household duties, without having had a moment given to her to tidy herself.

"We are going to take you for a trip, Barbara."

"A trip! Where to, sir?"

"To Paris, Barbara." The child gasped, and almost fell to the ground in her astonishment. "Don't be frightened. A brave little girl like you will be glad to see foreign countries."

Ronald's mother was busy with the little girl, smoothing her hair and arranging her poor clothes. She had a child's mantle, which she put on the girl, and a hat which made her look quite presentable. It was surprising what a few skillful touches achieved in poor little Barbara's appearance.

"Foring countries, sir!" she exclaimed, making no resistance to what was being done. "But I can't go, sir; I can't go! I must wait in London for Molly."

"We are going to try and find Molly, my dear."

"To find Molly! Oh—oh!"

Her joy was so profound that she could not utter another word. And when Ronald Elsdale, after embracing his mother fondly, took Barbara's hand and led her to the door, she yielded unresistingly. Away flew the cabs, and landed us at the railway station just in time to catch the eleven o'clock train. It was fortunate that we had only hand baggage with us, or we should have missed it. Within a few moments of our seating ourselves in the carriage we were speeding to Dover pier.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WE ARRIVE IN PARIS.

As we traveled to the sea I narrated what had occurred in my quest for Dr. Cooper, and was allowed to do so without interruption. Bob was unusually silent in the presence of his nephew and Barbara, and this silence was, as it were, enforced by himself. Several times he seemed to be on the point of interrupting me for the purpose of asking questions, and on each occasion he pulled up short and said nothing. Neither did Ronald speak much. It would have been natural had he made some observations upon the reason of Dr. Cooper's sudden departure in the company of Mr. Nisbet, and had he inquired whether I really believed the two men were traveling together. But respecting these matters he preserved absolute silence, and when he spoke it was upon any other subject than that of our all-engrossing mission. Barbara, also, had very little to say for herself—being altogether lost in the wonder of the adventure which was to introduce her to foreign countries—so we were not a very

lively party as we were whirled to Dover. We were less inclined for liveliness when we were at sea, all of us, with the exception of Ronald, being prostrate and helpless, the passage being a bad one. With the earth beneath our feet we soon recovered, and were reconciled to life, though Barbara plaintively inquired if we couldn't get back another way. Her appearance attracted a great deal of attention to us, of which we took no notice, being too deeply occupied with our own affairs. We were only twenty minutes late, and before eight o'clock we alighted at the Hôtel de Bade, where we engaged rooms, keeping Barbara as much out of sight as possible. The first thing we did was to go out and purchase a suitable outfit for the child at an immense establishment, the "Old England," where everything in the way of dress could be obtained, and when she was arrayed in her attire she said she felt like a princess. Of course she was in a state of bewildered admiration at the lights of Paris, which she declared beat "a theayter," and I have no doubt she thought either that she was dreaming or taking a part in a ravishing fairy story. Upon our return to the hotel I found a telegram awaiting me from Mr. Dickson, from which we learned that Mr. Nisbet and a gentleman who had accompanied him from London were at the Hôtel Chatham.

The last words of the telegram were, "Do nothing till you hear from me again. If you make open inquiries you may ruin all." This advice was sound but irritating, our mistaken impression being that by remaning idle, we were playing into the enemy's hands. There was nothing else for it, however; we were bound to wait for further information and instruction. We sent Barbara to bed early, and bade her not to leave her room in the morning till we called for her; then we went out and paced the bright boulevards. As we strolled and chatted Ronald suggested that we ought to ascertain for ourselves whether Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper were at the Hôtel Chatham; he had become very restless, and we endeavored in vain to argue him out of the idea. We only succeeded in prevailing upon him to allow Bob to go alone to the hotel, and find some excuse for looking over the book of arrivals in the office for the names of Nisbet and Cooper.

"Mr. Nisbet knows you," I said to Ronald, "and if he should see you we may as well return at once to England, for we shall have put him on his guard and have brought about our own defeat. He may also have some idea of my appearance, either from seeing me without my being aware of it, or from the description given of me by Dr.

Cooper, and there would be danger in my going to make inquiries. Your uncle is the safest party; Mr. Nisbet can know nothing of him, and if they meet his suspicions will not be aroused."

Bob went by himself to the Hôtel Chatham, not without inward misgivings, for he knew but a few words of French, and Ronald's assurance that the waiters and the managers could all speak English did not set him at his ease. However, he left us at the corner of Rue Daonou, making us promise not to wander away, in case he should not be able to find us upon his return, for he was distrustful of himself in the Paris streets, this being his first visit to the Continent. It was also my first visit, and I could not help thinking how poor a match for Mr. Nisbet Bob and I would have been without the assistance of Ronald Elsdale. Ronald was blind, it is true, but he could speak French and German fluently, and it was really he who guided us through the streets; he was familiar with every shop and building of note, and there was no fear of our losing our way in his company.

Bob was absent fifteen minutes or so, and he came back with the information that the name of Mr. Oliver Nisbet was on the books as having arrived this evening, but that he could not find the name of Cooper.

"Did you see anyone answering to their description?" asked Ronald.

"No one," replied Bob.

"All the better," I remarked.

"Why?" said Ronald. "Do you suppose they have any suspicion that they are being followed?"

"That is a question I cannot answer," I said, "though the probability is that Mr. Nisbet believes himself safe, or he would hardly have gone to so central a hotel as the Chatham; but it is certain that they are proceeding with some degree of caution, or the name of Cooper would have been found in the arrival book. Has any idea suggested itself to you that would be likely to explain the reason of Mr. Nisbet choosing Dr. Cooper as a companion?"

"Many ideas have suggested themselves," answered Ronald, "of which I have not yet spoken; but we will follow this one out, to see if we agree. You paid a visit to Dr. Cooper on Sunday evening, and, as his wife said to you this morning, he let his tongue run too freely. Her remark proves that some conversation must have passed between them as to your visit, and that Dr. Cooper recalled—not very distinctly perhaps—what it was he said. My belief is that this conversation took place in the presence of a third party, who was chiefly responsible for it."

"Of a third party!" I exclaimed.

"The third party," continued Ronald, "being Mr. Oliver Nisbet, who visited the Coopers on the following night. He must have had some motive for this visit, for it is not likely—after what you learned from Dr. Cooper's lips of the feeling he entertained toward Mr. Nisbet—that this gentleman would have paid his accomplice a visit in which there was no direct motive. I speak of them as accomplices because there is no doubt in my mind on the point. Dr. Cooper was bribed to give a false death certificate, false for the reason that he was not in a position to give a true one, and for this service Mr. Nisbet paid him, and made promises (according to Dr. Cooper) which he did not fulfill. Whether these promises were or were not as Dr. Cooper hinted is of small moment in what we are discussing, the one thing certain being that Dr. Cooper labored under a sense of injury, and believed himself to have been wronged. It is more than probable that, in some way, Dr. Cooper conveyed this impression to Mr. Nisbet, and that he was aware of it. This must have occurred years ago, and shortly afterward Dr. Cooper loses sight of his employer, and has no means of communicating with him. If he had known where to write to him he would certainly have done so, in

his state of poverty, and would most likely have thrown out some kind of threat. During this interval Mr. Nisbet keeps himself hidden from the man who has served him at a critical time; he has no use for him; all evidence of the crime (the nature of which has yet to be discovered) he has committed is destroyed, and there is only one person in the world who can throw the remotest suspicion upon him; that person is Dr. Cooper, and even he, if he dared take open action, would find himself implicated in the consequences. So matters rest for a considerable time, and we come now to the present. It is on Sunday only that you are informed by the private inquiry agent you employed that Mr. Nisbet had returned to London and was staying at the Métropole. Again crops up the hidden motive for his return. Was it to visit the house in Lamb's Terrace in which the crime was committed? Was it to seek Dr. Cooper for the purpose of obtaining his assistance in a fresh crime to be committed on foreign soil? Conjecture only will assist us here, for we know nothing; but conjecture, put to a logical use, may lead to the right conclusion. I assert that Mr. Nisbet's visit to London was expressly made either to go to Lamb's Terrace or to see Dr. Cooper; certainly for one of these reasons, perhaps for both. When you

learn that he is in London you are on your way to Dr. Cooper's house; you find him; you have a singular conversation with him; you return home, and my uncle informs you of the discovery of the clothes he has found in the attic cupboard. That those clothes belonged to Beatrice and the servant cannot be disputed. On Monday morning, after my uncle leaves you to find a temporary home for poor little Barbara, you also leave the fated house several hours, and you take especial care to deposit the clothes in what you believe to be a place of safety; unfortunately, as it happened, in the place in which they were first discovered. Now, who knows of that place of deposit? You, my uncle, and Mr. Nisbet. During your absence Mr. Nisbet obtains easy admission to the house, goes straight to the attic cupboard, and bears away with him the garments which, by devious circumstantial evidence, might be a danger to him. While he is in the house some signs therein lead him to suspect that it is not absolutely untenanted, and he sets watch upon it in the night. Looking from the window of the room occupied by you and my uncle you see Mr. Nisbet standing in the garden in a watchful, observant attitude; and as he stands there the spectral monitor which has set this inquiry at work gives you a sign—an unmistakable

sign from the spiritual throne of justice. Rank heresy or blind fatuity might misinterpret this sign; to you, to my uncle, to me, it is as clear as sunlight. It declared this man to be guilty of a horrible crime; it was like the writing on the wall. Satisfied or not, Mr. Nisbet leaves Lamb's Terrace, and goes to South Lambeth to see Dr. Cooper, of whose movements during the years that have passed he has had full knowledge. Mr. Nisbet is not only a dangerous man and a criminal, he is a man of resource and powerful intellect, and such a man leaves little to chance. Closeted with Dr. Cooper and his wife, he hears of your visit to him the previous evening; he worms out of his accomplice all that the man can recollect of your conversation with him; and he scents danger. Now, as I have said, whether he went to Dr. Cooper in the first instance to obtain his assistance in a fresh crime on foreign soil is hidden from us, but I am convinced that what he learns during this interview induces him to expedite his movements. He bids Dr. Cooper hold himself in readiness, and wins the wife's confidence by giving her money; thus they are both on his side. Were we and Dr. Cooper now in London you would worm nothing more out of him. Forewarned is to be forearmed, and his wife would see that he was not tampered with.

When Mr. Nisbet leaves Dr. Cooper last night, he has not quite settled the order or time of his future movements, but considering the matter afterward he sees the advisability of getting out of England without delay. Hence his resolution to leave for the Continent this morning; hence his telegram to Dr. Cooper to meet him immediately for the purpose of catching the early train; hence the hurried and sudden departure, with the particulars of which we are acquainted. Have I made myself clear?"

"Quite clear."

"He does not suspect that he is being followed; he does not suspect that his departure is known; least of all does he suspect that I am taking part in the hunt. But at the same time he recognizes the necessity of caution, and that is why Dr. Cooper is traveling under an assumed name."

A question was trembing on my tongue; it was whether, in the light of all that had been disclosed to him, the delusion he labored under with respect to Beatrice was now dispelled; but I feared to pain him, and I did not give utterance to the question.

"Do you not think," he said, "that Mr. Dickson has been rather remiss in not giving you the name and address of the agent who traveled, unknown to Mr. Nisbet, from London with him?"

"I wish he had done so," I replied, "for then we

could have some conversation with him to-night, which might have been of service to us. The telegram he sent me is a long one, and perhaps I shall have a letter from him in the morning."

This proved to be the case. In it Mr. Dickson acknowledged that it would have been as well if he had given me the name and address of his agent in his telegram; the name was Rivers, his address Hôtel Richmond. He had not heard from Mr. Rivers, he said, but when he did he would communicate to me everything the letter contained of any importance. I went at once to the Hôtel Richmond, which was not more than five minutes' walk from the Hôtel de Bade, and inquired for Mr. Rivers, and I took Ronald with me as interpreter, leaving Bob to look after Barbara.

"M. Rivers?" said the waiter, "but he has departed."

"When?"

"This morning early. He slept but one night."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"No, I do not know; I will ask the manager."

The manager did not know. After his coffee and roll M. Rivers had paid his bill and given up his room. Did he leave in a cab? No, he left on foot, carrying his bag with him. Perhaps he went to a railway station? Ah, it was possible. Perhaps

he was still in Paris. Ah, it was possible. If M. Rivers returned to the hotel, would the manager give him my card with a few words in pencil on it, asking him to come immediately to the Hôtel de Bade? M. Rivers should have the card, yes, with much pleasure. And so, good-morning.

I half expected to receive a letter from my wife, demanding an explanation of my running away, but there was none for me.

And now, nothing would satisfy Ronald but that Bob should go to the Hôtel Chatham, to ascertain if Mr. Nisbet was still there. He went and returned, we waiting for him as before at the corner of the Rue Daonou. Mr. Nisbet had left the hotel.

"I spoke to a fool of a waiter," said Bob, "who thought he could speak English, and that is all I could get out of him."

Ronald walked off at once to the hotel, and, knowing it would be useless to remonstrate, we followed him through the courtyard and into the office. There he entered into a conversation in French with a clerk. Yes, M. Nisbet and his friend had partaken of the usual first meal of the Frenchman, and had paid his bill and given up his room. Did they expect him to return? No, they did not. Had he and his friend occupied one room? Yes, a room with two beds. Did they leave on foot or in

a cab? In a cab. For a railway station? Possibly. Did the clerk know for which railway station? He did not; he would inquire, if it was of importance. It was of great importance—would he kindly inquire. The *concierge* was questioned. He did not know for which railway station. The waiters were questioned. They did not know for which railway station. And so, good-morning again. Thus were we left aground, as it were, with nothing but broken threads in our hands. Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper had escaped us.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE COME TO A HALT.

THE indefinite replies to our questions at the two hotels rendered us helpless. It was not even certain whether the men we were pursuing had left Paris, and Bob privately threw out to me an uncomfortable suggestion that Mr. Nisbet might have discovered we were watching him, and was turning the tables by watching us. Ronald was not in hearing when this was said; he was in a state of extreme agitation; and we were careful to do or say nothing to excite him. Despite his perturbation, however, he was the only one of our party whose reasoning on the position of affairs was fairly logical, and who made a sensible attempt to arrive at a probable sequence of events. Sitting down in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Bade for the purpose of discussing matters, Bob and I proceeded to plunge them into further confusion by our wild conjectures, and Ronald, after listening to us in silence for a few minutes, brought us to order.

"All this talk is useless," he said; "let us argue

like reasonable beings. The first thing we have to decide is whether Mr. Nisbet and his confederate have left Paris. What is your opinion?"

"I have none," I said.

"I am in the same predicament," said Bob.

"But we can be logical, at all events," said Ronald. "Compelled for a time to remain idle and in the dark, we can put flint and steel together in the endeavor to produce a light. I am inclined to the belief that they are no longer in the city. For what reason should they change hotels? Whatever may be the cause of their sudden association they would certainly wish to keep their movements quiet, and they would frustrate their wish by flitting from one hotel to another. From what I learned, Mr. Nisbet has paid frequent visits to Paris, and as his name appears frequently on the books of the Hôtel Chatham it is natural to suppose he has been in the habit of putting up there. If he had any fear that he was being followed, he would not yesterday have gone to an hotel where he was well known, but would have chosen another which was not in the center of the city, and where he would be less open to observation. The time they left the hotel favors the conclusion that they were bound for a railway station, and this conclusion is strengthened by the early departure of

Mr. Rivers, whose occupations have made him more methodical than ourselves. We are apprentices in the craft; he is an expert. The inquiry agent in London has doubtless telegraphed him of our arrival here, and where we are staying—in which case he would have called upon us long before now. Yes, the tracked and the tracker are no longer in the city."

"You have convinced me," said Bob, and I also recorded my conviction.

"The point to determine is," continued Ronald, "for what place they are bound. No person in Paris can assist us. Our only hope is in Mr. Dickson. Let us wire to him at once."

He and I went off straightway to the telegraph office, where we dispatched a message to Mr. Dickson. Bob remained in the hotel with Barbara, in order to receive a possible caller, who, it is needless to say, did not make his appearance. The answer to our telegram was that Mr. Dickson had received no information from his agent Rivers, that he had every confidence in his man, and that the moment he heard from him he would send us another wire. Meanwhile, we were to remain where we were, at the Hôtel de Bade. Nothing further reached us until nine o'clock at night, and then a welcome telegram, to the effect that the party were on their

way to Lucerne, whither we had better follow them by the earliest train. "Put up at Hôtel National," were the concluding words of the message. Upon studying the railway trains we found that nothing was to be gained by starting in the night, and early the following morning we were on the road to Lucerne. At the Hôtel National a telegram from Mr. Dickson awaited us, instructing us to remain at the hotel until we heard from Mr. Rivers, whom we might now consider in direct communication with us, and before many hours had passed we received a note from that gentleman. "Take the boat" (wrote Mr. Rivers) "to Tell's Platte. I am stopping at the Hôtel-Pension zur Tellsplatte, and shall be happy to see you there. From indications we have reached the terminus." This was agreeable news, and seemed to hold out the promise that we had at length tracked Mr. Nisbet down. We wasted no time, but took the first boat, and were presently steaming down the enchanting lake, the beauties of which perhaps only one of us thoroughly enjoyed, the little girl Barbara. "Oh," she sighed, "if Molly's 'ere, I don't wonder she never came back to London." It was three in the afternoon when we landed at Tell's Platte. We were in no mood for sightseeing, and did not therefore visit the chapel, but ascended the hill that led to the

hotel, where we found Mr. Rivers waiting for us.

He came forward to greet us, a short, wiry man, with clean-shaved face, browned with exposure to the sun, and a bright eye. He addressed me by name.

"Mr. Emery?"

"Yes."

"My I ask the name of the gentleman who is doing business for you in London?"

"Mr. Dickson."

"Have you anything you can show me from him?"

I produced telegrams and letters, and he looked over them and returned them to me.

"Quite right, sir. My employer told me there were four in your party. It is always necessary to make sure in such an affair as ours. We have a sharp gentleman to deal with, and there's no saying what tricks he might be up to, and what he knows or doesn't know. I am Mr. Rivers."

As I shook hands with him, I started, and he looked at me suspiciously.

"Anything the matter?" he inquired suspiciously.

"No," I replied, "nothing, nothing."

I introduced Ronald and Bob to him, and then Barbara.

"I've a little girl at home," he said in a kind tone, laying his hand on Barbara's head, "just your age and build." Then addressing me, "I have arranged rooms for you here. Very moderate—six francs a day; they must make a reduction for the girl."

"You anticipate that we shall remain here some time," I said.

"Until the business is finished, I expect. I should have liked a more retired spot, and perhaps it would have been as well if there were not so many of you; but that can't be helped, I suppose. There is no other place we could all have stopped at, and as we are to work together we must keep together. I will show you your rooms, and after you have had a wash we gentleman will have a chat, while Barbara can run about and amuse herself. By the way, you will be asked for your names. Don't give your own; I haven't given mine; never throw away a chance."

I must explain what caused me to start as I shook hands with Mr. Rivers. From the time we left London I had not seen the spectral cat, and I had an idea that it had taken its leave for good. But at that moment, casting my eyes to the ground, there was the apparition in full view. Much as it had troubled me during the first days of

our acquaintanceship I had by this time grown accustomed to it, and no longer regarded it with fear and aversion. In stating that I was glad to see it now, I am stating the truth, for it was to me an assurance that we had "reached the terminus," as Mr. Rivers expressed it in his note, and that we had been led in the right direction.

"Now we can have our chat," said Mr. Rivers, as we left the hotel together. "According to present appearances we have plenty of time before us, and nothing certainly can be done to-day. Whether anything at all can be done remains to be seen. Sometimes in an inquiry of a delicate nature we come to a block, and the next step depends entirely upon chance; it may be so in this case. I had best commence by telling you my position in the affair, and it will do no harm if I am quite frank with you. First and foremost, then, I am totally ignorant of what it is you wish to discover. My employer calls me into his private room, and gives me certain instructions. 'A gentleman has just arrived from the Continent,' he says, 'and is stopping at the Métropole. You will take him in hand, and keep close watch upon his movements. You are not to leave him a moment, and you are not for one moment to lose sight of him.' We generally hunt in couples when instructions like those are given,

because it isn't possible for one man to keep watch day and night, so while I was in London on the job I had a comrade, and we divided the watch so that we could get some sleep. I asked my employer if the instructions were to be carried out to the strict letter. 'To the strict letter,' he answered. 'Suppose the gentleman suddenly goes abroad?' I asked. 'You are to follow him,' he answered. That was the reason of my sudden disappearance from London, without having had time to consult my employer. I went alone, without my comrade; I did not feel warranted in incurring double expenses, and I thought I could manage the affair by myself when we were out of England. I was right, as it has turned out. Mr. Nisbet is here with another gentleman, and has taken up his quarters in a house about two miles away, which he has inhabited on and off for several years."

"Is that your idea of shadowing a man," asked Ronald, "when you are instructed not to lose sight of him for a moment and to keep close watch upon all his movements?"

"Begging your pardon, sir," replied Mr. Rivers, not the least ruffled by the rather sharp manner in which the question was asked, "a man can do no more than his best, and I have done that. Then he must be guided by circumstances. Keeping a

watch upon a man in London is one thing; keeping watch upon him in a village like this is another. There is no place in the world in which a man can lose himself so easily, if he is inclined that way, as London. I tell you, it's a difficult job to carry out properly, to keep your eye on a man in a large city, with its windings and turnings and crowds of people pushing this way and that. He gives you the slip when you least expect it, and there's the labor of days and weeks thrown away. It is quite a different matter here. A man comes and a man goes, and he can't keep his coming and going from the few people there are about. There are no cabs and omnibuses, no crowds to worry you and put you off the scent. When he moves from one spot to another he has to make preparations; he has to walk along unfrequented roads where he is in full sight of anyone interested in him. There are other drawbacks which one who knows the ropes has to reckon with. He can't keep watch here as he does in a large city; if he prowls and sneaks about, if he's seen haunting a particular spot for days, if he shadows a particular house and keeps his eye on it continually, he draws notice to himself. People ask what for? It comes to the ears of the man he's observing who, in turn, shadows him, and there's his apple cart upset. Another considera-

tion. Strike a man in a street in London, and a crowd collects. Strike a man on the head here when he's prowling up and down a lonely road, and no one sees it. Down he goes like a stone, and he can be done to death, and his body hidden in a hundred holes—and who's the wiser? That couldn't well be done, I grant you, to man, woman, or child who lives here; the absence is remarked, and the relations don't rest till they've found out what has become of the missing one. It's different with a stranger, who stops a day or so, or a week or so, and then, without a word, disappears. So long as he's here the hotel keeper takes an interest in him, because of the bill; the moment he's gone he's forgotten, and it's make way for the next. I've been employed on some difficult jobs in my time, and I'm not sure that this is not going to beat the record."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Ronald.

"I don't like the looks of the gentleman for one thing," replied Mr. Rivers, "and for the second thing I don't like the little I've found out about him since I've been here. But that's running ahead of my story. I'll get back to the London part of it, and make a finish of that. I suppose that is necessary, for my employer has written to me to put myself into your hands entirely, and to tell you

everything I know. Well, in London a remarkable thing happened. There's a house in Lamb's Terrace—79's the number—that is almost as lonely as any house round about us now. On the first day I shadowed Mr. Nisbet he paid three visits to Lamb's Terrace, and it was as much as I could do to keep myself out of his sight. I succeeded, though, because I was on my guard, and he never set eyes on me. The first visit he paid he did nothing more than reconnoiter; I put a reason to that. There happened to be an old man poking about the ground there for bits of rags and bones, and Mr. Nisbet didn't seem to relish his company. So, after reconnoitering ten or fifteen minutes, and as the old ragpicker didn't seem as if he was going to leave in a hurry, Mr. Nisbet cut his lucky, and walked out of the neighborhood. On his second visit there was no one in sight, and Mr. Nisbet, looking carefully around, took a key from his pocket, and let himself in. He remained in the house half an hour by my watch, and he came out with a bundle. There was something suspicious in that, I thought, but it was not my business to inquire into it. My instructions were clear, and I couldn't go beyond them. Besides, what call had I to tap the gentleman on the shoulder and say, 'I'll trouble you to tell me what you have under your

arm?' I should only have got myself in trouble, because our concern is a private one, and we haven't got the law to back us up. He took the bundle with him to the Métropole and left it there. He paid his third visit to Lamb's Terrace in the night, and this time he didn't go into the house. He didn't go to the front at all, but made his way to the back, and scrambled over the wall. He kept in the garden there, which is just choked up with weeds, for a precious long time, and all he did was to look up at the windows. I thought his going into an empty house in daylight and bringing out a bundle was queer, but I thought this last move a good deal queerer, for he kept quite still, and never took his eyes off the windows. When he'd had his fill he scrambled back over the wall and came away. From there he went straight to Theobald Row, South Lambeth, and knocked at the door of a chemist's shop kept by a doctor. The name over the shop window was Cooper. He stayed there an hour, and then returned to the Métropole. On the morning we left London I hadn't the ghost of an idea that he intended to start for Paris, and I followed him out of the Métropole to St. George's Hospital, outside of which he met the gentleman who has traveled with him to this place. I watched them pretty narrowly when we were on

the steamer, but I didn't venture into the same carriage with them when we traveled by rail. On the steamer and in Paris, and wherever I could keep my eyes on them, they seemed pretty thick, and I fancied once or twice that they didn't quite agree with each other. Whenever they talked it was away from people, and I knew that it was not accidental that they should always choose spots where they couldn't be overheard. On those occasions I wouldn't risk discovery by going near them, but watched them from a distance, and once or twice I saw Mr. Nisbet look at his companion in a way that made me think, 'I shouldn't like to meet you on a dark road, my friend, and for you to know that I was shadowing you.' There was a cold glitter in his eyes which might easily mean murder, and that is what makes me say again to you, gentlemen, that we shall have to be very careful in what we do in this part of the world."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

"Is that all you have to tell us," inquired Ronald, "of what came to your knowledge in London and on your journey here?"

"That is all," replied Mr. Rivers.

"Since you took up your quarters in this hotel what have you discovered?"

"Nothing more than I have already told you—that Mr. Nisbet lives in a house about two miles away. I have been expecting your arrival, and my orders are that I place myself at your service. The command is in your hands now."

"Have you seen the house?"

"No."

"From whom did you obtain your information?"

"From one of the waiters here, who is ready enough to talk about everything and everybody in the place. I pumped him cautiously, and learned a lot that I didn't care to hear and a little that I did."

"Do you speak French and German?"

"I can just make myself understood, and the

waiter can just make himself understood in English. He is anxious to know more of our language, as he intends to go to London and make his fortune, so I have been teaching him a bit. We are very good friends already, François and I."

"Is that his name?"

"I don't know; I call all foreign waiters François."

"I suppose you have not discovered whether Mr. Nisbet lives alone?"

"I haven't got as far as that; I thought it advisable to leave it to you gentlemen. It stands to reason that there must be someone in the house to do the domestic work. I have an idea, if you care to listen to it."

"We will listen to everything that is likely to assist us."

"This is likely to do so. François will wait upon us at dinner. One of you, Mr. Emery for choice—you have a solid look about you, sir, if you don't mind my saying so—is an hotel keeper in London, and when François gets to London, if you haven't a vacancy in your own establishment, you will be able to assist him to obtain a situation in another. That will be a sufficient bribe, and it will insure our being waited upon properly as long as we remain here."

"I will play the part with pleasure," I said. "It is a good idea."

So it was arranged, and at dinner François waited upon us with neatness and dispatch, having received a hint from Mr. Rivers as to my supposed vocation in London. In his hearing I dropped a hint or two which I perceived he caught up in praise of his politeness and dexterity, and I saw that, thus encouraged, he would be of service to us. He was also led to understand from our conversation that it was our intention to make a stay here of several days, and in this and other ways we endeavored to lead up to the success of our scheme. It would have been unwise, however, in my opinion, to make any sudden and specific inquiries respecting Mr. Nisbet; I felt that we could not proceed too carefully, and I determined to leave these inquiries till the following day.

Meanwhile we had a difficulty with Ronald. Dinner over, he announced his intention of walking to Mr. Nisbet's house in our company, and it was long before we could dissuade him.

"Why should I not go?" he asked.

"Why should you go?" I asked in return. "You can do nothing until we have laid our plans. If it should happen that Mr. Nisbet sees you, all our labor is thrown away. It is right that the house

should be reconnoitered without delay, but for us to do that in a body would be inviting defeat. Mr. Rivers and I will undertake this alone, and you must remain here with your uncle and Barbara."

He consented unwillingly, and we were about to set forth when Barbara plucked my sleeve.

"Well, my child?" I said.

"If yer going to see Molly, sir," she said, with tears in her eyes, "won't yer take me with yer?"

The fears that oppressed me with respect to her sister rendered this imploring appeal of solemn import.

"We don't know that we shall see Molly, my dear," I said gravely. "We must look about us first before we can decide what to do. I am afraid Mr. Nisbet is not a good man, and we must be very careful. You must leave everything to us, Barbara."

"Yes, sir, in course I must do that. But if yer *do* see Molly, yer'll give 'er my love, won't yer, and arks 'er if I can come to 'er?"

"If we see her, my dear, we will be sure to tell her all about you."

"She *will* be surprised, won't she, sir?"

"Yes, Barbara, yes," I said, and I left her with a heavy heart.

On the road it occurred to me that, in keeping

Mr. Rivers in complete ignorance of the nature of our suspicions respecting Mr. Nisbet, I might be placing difficulties in our way, and weakening the assistance he was ready to give us. Therefore I enlightened him to some extent, being careful to make no mention of the supernatural visitants which had made me take up the matter.

"What I have related," I said in conclusion, "is under the seal of confidence, and is not to be mentioned unless the mystery is brought to light. Just at this moment I confess to feeling dispirited; the web of conjecture is so slight that I am oppressed by the feeling that we may, after all, be following a will-o'-the-wisp, and that there is no ground for the suspicions that have led me on."

"That is one way of putting it," observed Mr. Rivers, "but as you suspect that a crime has been committed, would it not be a relief to you to find that there is no ground for the suspicion?" I was at a loss to reply to this question, and he proceeded. "It may be due to the occupation I follow, but I generally place the worst construction upon these matters. If I were otherwise inclined, I should place the worst construction upon this, and my belief is that Mr. Nisbet has been guilty of nothing less than murder. Every circumstance in the case points to the conclusion, which is strength-

ened by the impression he has produced upon me. He is a man capable of any desperate deed, or I am no judge of character. I am obliged to you for the confidence you have placed in me; it certainly renders me less powerless in the assistance I may be able to render. I have a starting point, you see. Just at present there are two questions in my mind to which we must endeavor to find an answer. First, what has become of the girl Molly? I should know how to work her if I could lay hands on her. Second, what is the meaning of the association of Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper? To their former association, when Mr. Nisbet and his stepdaughter were living in Lamb's Terrace, where the poor lady met her death, there is an absolutely plain answer. Mr. Nisbet wanted a death certificate from a doctor who was imperfectly acquainted with the facts, and he paid Dr. Cooper to supply it. This certificate being accepted at the inquest, and the body cremated, Mr. Nisbet was safe. In the absence of proof, of what practical value would mere suspicion be? He could snap his fingers at it. But the circumstance of his taking Dr. Cooper suddenly and unexpectedly from London, and of the doctor being in his house at this moment, puzzles me."

"Mr. Nisbet requires his assistance again," I suggested.

"That is the natural inference, and we have to discover the exact nature of this required assistance. If bold measures are necessary we must adopt them."

"I am ready. Have you any theory as to Molly?"

"I can think of more than one. The girl was young at the time of the lady's death; Barbara is by no means bad looking; Molly was pretty, I dare say; she was poor, she was ignorant; Mr. Nisbet may have taken a fancy to her——"

I interrupted him. "No, Mr. Rivers, I cannot entertain the theory that Molly consented to become Mr. Nisbet's mistress."

"I will not force it upon you," said he dryly, "but perhaps I am a better judge of human nature than yourself. However, we shall soon discover something; we shall not be kept long in the dark."

We had little difficulty in finding the house inhabited by Mr. Nisbet, and its appearance deepened my apprehensions. In saying that we found the house I am not quite exact, for a high wall surrounded it, and only the gables could be seen. This wall was of surprising extent, and could have occupied not less than an acre of ground. It was of stone, and might have been built round a prison. We walked cautiously around it, keeping close in

its shadow and prepared at any moment to stroll carelessly away in the event of an inmate issuing from either of the gates—one in the front, the other in the rear—which afforded ingress to it.

Night had fallen, and there was no moon, so that we were comparatively safe from observation, but this did not make us less cautious in our movements. We were waging our silent battle with a wary foe, and to be taken unaware would be fatal to us.

There was no other house near the building. At no great distance were towering ranges of rock and tree which intensified the gloom of the habitation. Retreating to a hillock we ascended it, and from that height perceived lights in some of the upper windows.

"A pleasant residence," said Mr. Rivers, with a slight shiver. "One can imagine any deed of darkness being perpetrated within those walls. Hush! Don't move!"

I saw the reason for the caution. The hill on which we stood faced the gate in the rear of the house, and as Mr. Rivers laid hold of me and whispered in my ear, this gate was slowly opened and a form issued from it. I could not at that distance distinguish whether it was the form of a man or a woman; what I could distinguish was that the

figure paused a moment or two and seemed to peer within the grounds. Then, closing the gate with an appearance of caution, the figure came into the open, and limped away.

"Step softly," whispered Mr. Rivers, and taking me by the hand we followed the figure, which we presently discerned to be that of an old woman, who walked as if she were lame. I stepped almost as softly as my companion, and we succeeded in approaching close to her without being observed. She was carrying something in her hands, covered with a white cloth. Night's shadows befriended us, and it was evident that the woman had no notion that she was being followed. Mr. Rivers did not speak, nor did I. We must have walked half a mile when the woman stopped before a wretched hut, which she entered without knocking.

"We must see what she's up to," whispered Mr. Rivers. "She belongs to Mr. Nisbet's house, and has crept away in secret. It is my opinion we're in luck."

Stealing round the hut we came to a window at the back over which there was no curtain, so that, although the glass was to some extent obscured by dust and mud, we could see what was passing within. On the ground lay a gaunt man, and by his side on a low stool sat a girl about twelve years

of age, as nearly as I could judge. The girl had jumped up at the entrance of the old woman, but the man appeared to be too weak to raise himself. This was proved by the woman kneeling by him on one side and the girl kneeling by him on the other; by their united efforts they lifted him into a sitting posture, and then the woman removed the white cloth from the article she had carried from Mr. Nisbet's house; it was a large dish filled with food, and though she had come some distance the ascending steam proclaimed that it was still warm. The woman fed him with a spoon, and presently drew from a capacious pocket a bottle of red wine; he ate sparely, but he drank with avidity. When he had finished the girl partook of the food, and the eager way in which she ate reminded me of the night we found little Barbara in Lamb's Terrace. There was a pathos in the scene that touched me to the heart, but of course I could not hear what was said by the poor actors therein.

We waited till the old woman left the hut; she took the empty dish and the white cloth with her. When she came out we followed her back to Mr. Nisbet's house, which she entered by the back gate, adopting similar precautions to those which had marked her departure from it.

"A winning move," said Mr. Rivers in a tone of

satisfaction as we retraced our steps to the Hôtel-Pension zur Tellsplatte.

"In what way?" I asked, for though I was impressed by what I had witnessed, I did not at the moment see in what way it could be turned to our advantage.

"The food and wine were stolen from Mr. Nisbet," replied Mr. Rivers, "and in that wretched hut we shall obtain the key to his house. We have done a good night's work."

During our absence Ronald and Bob had not been idle. By promising François pecuniary assistance to enable him to reach the paradise of waiters, they had won him completely over, and he had disclosed everything he knew relating to Mr. Nisbet's domestic affairs, and to the estimation in which he was held. He was not in favor, it appeared; he kept himself aloof from everybody in the place, and lived the life of an eccentric and a recluse. Reputed to be rich, he had not been known to do a single act of kindness to the poor peasantry in the district. There had been an explosion in a mine, there had been a conflagration, a neighboring village had been inundated, and he did not contribute a franc to the relief of the sufferers. Some people declared that he possessed "the evil eye," and that he could "will" misfortune upon those who

offended him. As for his establishment, it consisted of himself, a young female, who was said to be daft, and an old woman who acted as cook and general housekeeper. The old woman's name was Bernstein, the young woman's was not known. She had not been seen for years outside the walls of the house. When Mr. Nisbet went away Mme. Bernstein was left in charge of the establishment, and neither then nor at any other time was any person admitted inside the grounds. Food and wine were taken in at the gates, by the master himself when he was at home, by Mme. Bernstein when he was absent. This was the sum total of the information which had been elicited from François.

After hearing this we related to Bob and Ronald our own adventure, and then we fell to discussing the next step to be taken, and Ronald urged that an endeavor should be made to obtain admission to the house.

"It will be dangerous to attempt such a thing," said Bob, "while Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper are there. François tells us that the master is sometimes seen out searching for herbs or specimens. If he continues the practice it is likely that Dr. Cooper will accompany him on these expeditions. Then will be the time."

"My opinion is," I said, "that, before we attempt so bold a move, we shall win Mme. Bernstein over to our side."

"I undertake to accomplish that," said Mr. Rivers, "and not later than to-morrow night. But first let us have François in. I should like to get something more out of him."

François was summoned, and wine was ordered. When he brought the bottle in, Mr. Rivers held a conversation with him. Was he acquainted with Mme. Bernstein? No, he was not, but he had heard something of her brother. Ah, she had a brother? Yes, a poor fellow very near death's door, and without a sou in the world. She had a little niece also, the brother's child. Where did they live? He described the hut to which Mme. Bernstein had taken the food and wine. Was Mme. Bernstein kind to them? He did not know—he had not heard; nobody took any trouble about them; the child begged of passing tourists, but she got very little, not enough to keep body and soul together. François could tell us nothing more.

Before we went to bed we decided to keep watch on Mme. Bernstein the next night, and to be guided by what occurred. Needless to say that Barbara was not present at this discussion. She

was too young to be admitted fully into our confidence. We kept ourselves very quiet during the following day, and when night set in the four of us set out for Mr. Nisbet's house. Ronald insisted upon accompanying us, and we could not but submit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WORD WITH MME. BERNSTEIN.

NOTHING of importance happened on the way. We passed one or two stragglers who did not speak to us, and who, in the darkness of the night, could have seen very little of us; we, on our part, were more watchful, and though we exchanged but few words nothing escaped our attention. It behooved us to be thus careful, because there was the risk of our coming into contact with our common foes, Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper. In silence we reached the gloomy wall which surrounded the building, and, marshaled by Mr. Rivers, took up our posts of observation. Rivers and I were together on the hill in the rear of the house, Ronald and his uncle were some dozen yards off. They were to keep their eyes on us, and to observe certain signals which had been arranged upon. Very nearly at the same moment as on the previous night, the gate was slowly opened, and Mme. Bernstein appeared, carrying a dish covered with a white cloth. She paused at the open gate, and peered this way and that, to make sure that she was not

seen, and then she closed the gate softly, and proceeded in the direction of the hut. We followed her warily at a safe distance; she reached the hut and entered it, and gave the man and the child food and wine, Rivers and I watching them through the uncurtained window at the back of the hut.

The meal finished, the old woman kissed the child, and issued from the hut. All her movements were in accordance with our anticipation, and this being so, a certain plan we had agreed upon was immediately acted upon. Ronald and his uncle remained behind, the intention being that they should make an endeavor to get into conversation with either the sick man or the child, or with both, and to extract from them some information of Mr. Nisbet's establishment which might assist our operations. Rivers and I played our part in the plan by following Mme. Bernstein. Midway between the hut and Mr. Nişbet's house Rivers nudged me, and we quickened our steps. Hearing the sound the old woman stopped, and we also stopped. After listening a moment or two she fancied she was deceived, and she hobbled on again, we following with rapid steps. Again she paused, and gave a scream as we came close to her. Putting his hand on her shoulder, Rivers said:

"Do you speak English, Mme. Bernstein?"

"Yes, a little," she replied, trembling in every limb. "Do not hurt me—I am an old woman; I have no money."

"You speak English very well," said Rivers. "We will not harm you. It is only that we wish to have a word with you. We do not want money; we have money to give, if you would like to earn it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand that you will not hurt an old woman, and that you have money to give."

I ought here to explain that the English Mme. Bernstein spoke was by no means so clear and grammatical as I set it down, but I find myself unable to reproduce her peculiar method and idioms, and consider it best, therefore, to put what she said plainly before the reader. We understood each other, and that was the main point.

"But it must be earned. Do not tremble so; we are not robbers; we are officers of the law. What have you under that cloth? A basin, empty. You took it from the house full. You can be punished for that, Mme. Bernstein. The master did not give you the food, he did not give you the wine. You stole them, Mme. Bernstein."

Overcome with terror she fell upon her knees, and implored us to spare her; she had taken the

food to save a little child from starvation; she had never done it before——

Rivers interrupted her. "You do it every night, madame." Which plunged her into deeper despair.

Still keeping her sensible that she was in our power, and that we would have her punished if she did not do as we bade her, Rivers succeeded in pacifying her to some extent.

"There are four of us," he said, when she rose from the ground; "two are here, two are with your brother and his child, who without our aid will starve if you are put in prison or can no longer rob your master of food. It is with you, madame; you can save or ruin them, you can save or ruin yourself."

"What is it that I shall do?" she quavered. "Tell me, and I will do it."

"That is as it should be," said Rivers, "and you shall be rewarded. We must know everything about the master you serve. We are here from England for that purpose, and he must not be told that you have spoken with us. You will swear it by the cross which is hanging from your neck."

She lifted the black wooden cross to her lips, and kissed it. "I swear it, sir," she said. "He shall not be told; he shall not know. But if you keep me here now he will discover it without being told. He will be waiting for supper, and I shall not be

there to serve it. He will come and look for me, and then it will be ruin for me and you. He is a hard man, a bad man, a wicked man, and I hate him."

"That pleases me," said Rivers blithely. "Why do you remain in his service?"

"Should I not starve if I went away? I get my food, and I save it and give it to my dying brother and the little child. That is something. Do not keep me here too long. Englishmen are rich; you have a watch. What hour is it?"

"Half past ten," said Rivers.

"At eleven they have supper. If I am not in the house——"

"You shall be there. Let us walk on, Mme. Bernstein. In ten minutes we shall reach the gate, and he will not know. Does he go to bed late?"

"Sometimes at twelve, sometimes at one; it is not certain."

"At what hour last night?"

"At twelve."

"Keep watch, madame, to-night, and when he goes to his room and the house is quiet, you will come out to us, and we will talk."

"Yes, I will come."

"By the back gate, madame; we shall be on the hill. Do not forget—you shall be rewarded. And

do not forget that you have sworn upon the cross. Here, to commence with, are two francs, to prove that we are in earnest, and are men of our word."

She clutched the coins eagerly, and said in a whisper: "We are near the house—do not speak loud, or he will hear us. There is something strange and terrible. You shall be told of it. I will come when they sleep."

We did not accompany her to the gate. She glided forward, opened it quietly, and disappeared.

"Now, Mr. Emery," said Rivers, "can you find your way alone to the hut?"

"Yes, it is a straight road."

"Go, and bring your friends here. There is strength in numbers. Something strange and terrible, she said. We have not come a moment too soon. Hurry back quickly."

I wasted no time, and soon reached the hut. Ronald and Bob were within; I heard them talking to the little girl. When I tapped at the door and called to them, they joined me immediately, and hearing that they were to return with me they spoke a few parting words to the child, and promised to call and see her again. I briefly related what had passed between ourselves and Mme. Bernstein, and asked if they had obtained any information.

"None," replied Bob, "that is likely to assist us. Some general expressions of dislike toward Mme. Bernstein's employer, of whom they seem to stand in some sort of fear—that is all. Neither the man nor the child has ever been inside the house. But we made friends with them, and that might have served us with Mme. Bernstein if you had not already enlisted her. Everything seems to depend upon what will occur during the next twenty-four hours."

We found Rivers lying on his back on the hill, with his hands clasped behind his head.

"I have been watching the windows," he said, 'and making a mental map of the house. All the bedrooms seem to be situated at the back; the ordinary living rooms are in front. See—there is a light in only one of the rooms; there was a light in that room last night. It burns steadily, and without flickering; the room is occupied, but no shadow has appeared on the blind, nor has the light been shifted. Someone is sleeping there, and sleeping undisturbed. If we stopped here till daylight we should probably find that light still burning. Afraid to sleep in the dark, denoting a nervous organization. Ah, observe. Two rooms have just been entered; each person, entering, carried in a candle with him; the lights shift and waver; there

are shadows on the blinds. One is the shadow of Mr. Nisbet, the other the shadow of Dr. Cooper; their bedrooms adjoin. Rather restless those shadows. We have the advantage of them; we can see them, they cannot see us lying here in black darkness. I am in my element, and can work out theories. I have done the same in country places in England, and the theories I have worked out there have led to very useful conclusions. Isn't there a German or French story of a man who sold his shadow to the devil? I can imagine occasions when our friend Mr. Nisbet would gladly sell his, for shadows are sometimes criminating witnesses. Those men do not seem in a hurry to get to bed. One has gone into the other's room; the flaring of the candle shows that he has left his door open. The shadows of the two men are now in one room. They walk up and down in their slippers—of that you may be sure. There is something so secret and mysterious going on in the house—which might be a prison or a private lunatic asylum—that the principal conspirators are careful to make no noise. They have no wish to disturb the sleeper in the third room, which, by a stretch of the fancy, we might suppose to be occupied by a dead person. By the way, did Dr. Cooper have time to bring his slippers with him from London? I should say not;

therefore he is wearing a pair of Mr. Nisbet's or is walking in his stocking feet. Now they stop, now they walk about again, and now—yes, now they go into the room which the first man left. Science has been busily at work of late years, but it has not yet discovered a means of bringing sound to our ears as this glass which I am holding brings the figures of those men near to my eyes. There is the telephone, but you cannot carry a telephone about with you in a little pocket case. I dare say the discovery will be made one of these days. Mr. Nisbet is a couple of inches taller than Dr. Cooper, and as they are now standing quite still I know which is one, and which the other; therefore I shall presently know which is Mr. Nisbet's bedroom, and which Dr. Cooper's. If we could only hear what they are saying to each other! Speaking in whispers, of course—again for the reason that they do not wish to disturb the sleeper in the third room. Mme. Bernstein will inform us who it is who sleeps there. What do you say—a man or a woman?"

The question was addressed to us, and we expressed our inability to answer it.

"I say a woman," continued Rivers, who was certainly in his element, as he had declared, "and until Mme. Bernstein favors us with her company

we remain in ignorance as to who the woman is. Our little Barbara's sister? Perhaps. But Barbara describes her sister as being a lively young person, and no lively young person lies sleeping there. How do I arrive at that conclusion? Impossible to say. Mental cerebration, if you like. We work out plots as novelists do, or rather, they work out themselves. Concentration is the agent. The same process leads me to the conclusion that the conspirators yonder are walking and talking noiselessly because of their fear of being overheard. The same process leads me to the conclusion that they are quietly discussing an important and dangerous matter. How did Mr. Nisbet's stepdaughter meet her death? Asphyxiation caused by an escape of gas while sleeping in a bedroom almost hermetically sealed. But there is no gas in these parts, and their light is supplied by oil and candle. Therefore they are deprived of that means of causing death. What are they doing now? The shorter of the two, Dr. Cooper, holds something up to the light. The object is too small to be discerned at this distance, but I take it to be a vial. Not a wine bottle, nor a bottle containing brandy or whisky. A small vial. And now Mr. Nisbet hands his co-conspirator a wineglass; he holds that up also; the shadow is reflected on the blind, and

you can see by the shape that it is not a tumbler. The vial in one hand, the wineglass—it may be a medicine glass—in the other, Dr. Cooper is pouring a few drops from the vial into the glass. He counts the drops; I can't see his lips move, but unless I am dreaming he is counting the drops. He puts down the vial, and Mr. Nisbet takes the glass from. him. To drink? No. He dips his finger into the liquid, and puts that finger to his lips. He stands still a while; he is deliberating. Is it satisfactory, Mr. Nisbet? If it is, and you need a sleeping draught, drink it off, and wish your companion good-night. You do nothing of the kind. You come to the window; you draw aside the blind; you open the window."

"We shall be seen," whispered Bob, in great alarm.

"We are as safe," said Rivers calmly, "as if we wore caps that rendered us invisible, as in the fairy tale. As they stand side by side at the window, the position of the light enables me to see them clearly. They *are* Mr. Nisbet and Dr. Cooper. Provoking! What is it that Mr. Nisbet has just done? Why did you move, you fool of a doctor? But I guess what he did. He emptied the glass out of the window. Of course, of course; that was it. They have been making a chemical experi-

ment, testing a liquid—to what end? Mr. Nisbet peers into the dark grounds, he stares straight at the hill upon which we are lying. Don't stir a finger. It is curious that criminals almost invariably overlook some slight circumstance which supplies the clew to their conviction. It has been so in thousands of cases. The window is closed, the blind is pulled down. See the shadows of the men as they approach and retreat, growing to monstrous proportions, dwindling to nearly natural size. The shadows of Fate. I suppose by this time the conference is at an end. It is. They separate. Each is in his own room. Ah, I see which room is occupied by Mr. Nisbet, and which by Dr. Cooper. The doctor gets into bed first. Out goes his light. Sleep the sleep of the just, doctor, if you can. Mr. Nisbet lingers; his is the greater stake. He is the principal, his companion is the tool. Take care, the pair of you; the dogs are on your track. Mr. Nisbet puts out his light; all the windows are masked except the window of the third room. Good-night, good-night."

These ingenious theories filled me with wonder, and I accepted them as if they were proved testimony; and I am positive, from the remarks made by Bob and Ronald, that they also accepted them as I did. Rivers chuckled, and said:

"It is a fine art, and we become masters only by long study. Now for Mme. Bernstein. She will not keep us waiting long."

She did not. In a few minutes the gate was opened, and the old woman appeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MME. BERNSTEIN REVEALS.

RIVERS went forward to meet her, and taking her hand, led her to where we were standing. Dark as it was I saw that she was greatly agitated, and the increase of our party did not lessen her agitation.

"You perceive," Rivers commenced, "that it is as I said. There are four of us, and we are determined to know the truth about your master and what is going on in that gloomy house, which, as I just remarked to my friends, resembles a prison."

"I will tell you everything," said Mme. Bernstein, her voice shaking with fear. "Why should I not, when you have promised to reward me? I have done nothing wrong."

"Do not speak so sharply to her," said Ronald to Rivers; "you frighten her." Then he turned to the old woman, and spoke to her in French, and his manner was so kind and his voice so gentle that she soon forgot her fears. "You shall be well rewarded," he said to her; "I promise you on the honor of a gentleman. We have left a little money with your brother and his pretty little girl, and

to-morrow we will send a doctor to see him. If it were day instead of night you would know that I am blind, and you would trust me."

"I trust you now, sir," said Mme. Bernstein. "But this gentleman"—indicating Rivers—"speaks to me as if I had committed a crime. I will answer you anything. It is because I am poor that I have served M. Nisbet, and if I have taken a little bit of food for my dying brother and the child I hope you will protect me from the anger of M. Nisbet. He is a hard man; he would have no mercy."

"We will protect and befriend you," said Ronald. "Have no fear. My friends here do not understand French very well, so we will converse now in English. Express yourself as well as you can; we all wish to hear what you have to say, and we all are kindly disposed toward you. Mr. Rivers, you are so much more experienced than ourselves that the command must be left in your hands, but I beg you to moderate your tone when you address madame."

"With all the pleasure in life," said Rivers cheerfully. "Bless your heart, madame, you need not be frightened of me; if I speak sharp it's only a way I've got. Don't you take any notice of it, but begin at the beginning, and go straight on. How long have you been in service here?"

'Ever since M. Nisbet first came," replied Mme. Bernstein. "It is years ago—I don't know how many—and he bought the house, and wanted a woman to look after it. When he goes away to England or France I attend to everything." She stopped here, as if at a loss how to proceed.

"We shall get to the bottom of things all the quicker," said Rivers, "if I ask you questions. Has there been any other person besides yourself in Mr. Nisbet's service?"

"No one else—it is I alone who have served him."

"Does he live here alone?"

"Oh, no. When he first came he brought a lady with him."

"And she is still in the house?"

"Oh, yes; she is still in the house, poor lady!"

Instinctively we all turned our eyes to the window which Rivers had declared to be the window of the room occupied by a lady—even Ronald's sightless eyes were turned in that direction.

"That is her bedroom?" Rivers asked.

"Yes, it is there she sleeps."

"Hold hard a bit," he cried. "She is awake."

The occupant of the room had moved the light, and we saw her shadow on the blind. We looked up in silence, expecting that something strange

would occur. I cannot explain the cause of this impression, but in subsequent conversation with my companions they confessed that they had experienced the same feeling of expectation as myself. What did occur was this: The blind was pulled up, and the window opened, and by the window stood a female figure in a white nightdress, stretching out her arms toward us. It was not possible that she could see us, but her imploring attitude seemed like an appeal to us to save her from some terrible danger, and it powerfully affected me.

I put my finger to my lips, to warn Bob and Rivers against uttering any exclamation of surprise, and I placed myself in such a position that Mme. Bernstein could not see what we saw. Presently the female's arms dropped to her side, and she sank upon a chair by the window, and sat there while Rivers continued his examination.

"Why do you say 'poor lady'?" asked Rivers. "Is she suffering in any way?"

"She is much to be pitied," replied Mme. Bernstein. "So young and beautiful as she is!"

"But explain, madame. You speak in enigmas. Does your master oppress her? Is he cruel to her?"

"I do not know. She does not complain, but I would not trust him with a child of mine."

"Is she his child, then?"

"Oh, no; but he has authority over her. He has never struck her, he has never spoken a harsh word to her; still I would not trust him."

"We shall get at it presently, I suppose," said Rivers impatiently. "What is the lady's name?"

"Mlle. Mersac."

"Her Christian name?"

"I have not heard it, all the years I have been in the house. There was no reason why I should hear it. Mlle. Mersac—is not that a sufficient name?"

"It must content us for the present. If she is not his daughter she is doubtless some relation?"

"It cannot be—he has himself declared that she is not. I ventured one day—it is now a long time ago—to ask him, and he answered me angrily, and bade me attend to my duties, and nothing more. He repented a little while afterward, and came to me and inquired why I had put the question to him. 'It was a thought, sir,' I said. 'Can you see any likeness between us?' he asked. I answered no, and there is no likeness. She is fair, he is dark; there is not the least resemblance between them."

"May we say that she is afflicted?"

"Sorely afflicted. She has no memory, she seems to have no mind. From one day to another

she cannot recollect. Each day is new to her; she has no memory. Even her own name is strange to her. When my master is here I see her only in his presence, and am not allowed to speak to her. When he is absent I see more of her; it is necessary; she has no one else to attend to her. But even then she utters but a very few words. Once only did we have a conversation while the master was away. It was against his commands, but I could not help it. He gives his orders what I shall do during his absence, and I am to do those things, and nothing more. To give her her meals, to give her her medicine, not to allow her to pass the gates. For years she has not been outside those walls."

"You are wandering, madame. Once you had a conversation with her. Inform us what was said."

"I pitied her, and asked her whether she had no friends she wished to see. 'Friends!' she said, and looked at me wonderingly. 'The world is dead!' I could have shed tears, there was such misery in her voice. I addressed her by her name. 'Mersac!' she exclaimed. 'Who is Mlle. Mersac?' 'But, mademoiselle,' I said, 'it is yourself.' 'Are you sure of that?' she asked. 'Why, yes,' I answered, 'it is certain.' She shuddered and said, 'I had dreams, I think, when I was a child, but I

am an old woman now.' 'Mademoiselle,' I cried, 'you are young, you are beautiful!' 'It is you who are dreaming,' she said, 'I am an old woman. The world is dead. This house is my tomb!' That is all that passed; she would not speak another word. If I had dared, if I had not been poor and had known what to do and how it was to be done, I would have tried to find her friends, for what hope of recovery is there for her in such a place as this? For me who have not long to live—I am seventy-five—it does not matter. I have lived here all my life, and I shall die here; there is no other place for me to die in, and I am content that it should be so. But even I had my bright years when I was a young woman. I had a lover, I had a husband, I had children; they are all dead now, and but for my dying brother and his little girl I am alone. I was not so beautiful as mademoiselle; I was not a lady as she is. That is plainly to be seen. At her time of life she should be bright and happy; she should have a lover; she should have friends, companions. They might wake her up, for though she is not dead she might as well be."

The old woman spoke very feelingly, and I patted her on the shoulder.

"Thank you," she said, as though I had bestowed a gift upon her.

"She is a French lady?" questioned Rivers.

"Oh, no; she is English."

"English! But her name is French."

"It may not be hers. She is perhaps sent here to be forgotten. It is sad, very sad!"

"Apart from this loss of memory, from this forgetfulness of herself, is she in health?"

"She is strong, she is well otherwise. It is only her mind that is gone. She gripped my hand once; it was the grip of a strong young girl. She is lithe, she is well formed. If I had been like her when I was her age I should have been proud. I brought some flowers to the house one day. 'Who are these for?' my master asked. 'I thought mademoiselle would like them,' I answered. He frowned, and taking them in his hands crushed them and threw them to the ground. 'That is not part of your duties,' he said. I brought no more flowers. There are some strange things, some things I cannot understand. Do you come to help the poor lady? Are you related to her?"

"We are not related to her, but we will help her if it is in our power."

"Heaven will reward you for it."

"What do you mean by saying there are strange things, things you cannot understand?"

"For one—why does the master say she will not

live, when, but for her loss of memory, she is strong and well?"

"Oh, he says that, does he?"

"Yes, and he has brought a friend with him now, a celebrated doctor, because, as I heard him say, she is sinking. What does that mean?"

"Ah," said Rivers, in a significant tone which we understood, "what does that mean, indeed? It means mischief, Mme. Bernstein."

"It is what I think. Now I have opened my heart I do not care what happens to me. This celebrated doctor that he has brought from England with him is no better than my master is. They are a pair. But what can she do against them alone?"

"She is no longer alone, madame," said Ronald, with a strange earnestness in his voice. "The lady is beautiful, you say. Very fair?"

"As fair as a lily, sir."

"You can tell me the color of her eyes."

"They are blue as a summer sky, and there is sometimes a light as sweet in them."

"What would be her age, in your opinion, madame?"

"Not more than twenty-four, and though she suffers so, she sometimes looks like a maid of eighteen."

"When your master is absent he leaves medicine for her to take? He places this medicine in your charge? Is it a liquid?"

"It is a liquid."

"And its color, madame?"

"White."

"Is it clear? Has it a sediment?"

"It is perfectly clear, like water?"

"How often does she take it?"

"Once every day, in the evening."

"Does she take it willingly?"

"Quite willingly."

There was a brief silence here, and I observed Ronald pass his hands across his eyes. It was he who was asking these questions, and Rivers did not interpose.

"Mme. Bernstein, did you ever taste this medicine?"

"Ah, sir, you make me remember what I had forgotten. I am old; forgive me. It was this, also, that was in my mind when I said there were strange things I could not understand. It happened two years ago. Mademoiselle had left nearly half the dose in the glass, and had gone to bed. I took it up and tasted it; it was as water in my mouth, and—I do not know why—I drank what remained. 'It is not likely to harm me,' I

thought, 'for it does not harm mademoiselle.' I went to bed and slept soundly. In the morning when I awoke it was with a strange feeling. I had some things to do; I could not remember what they were. I dressed myself and sat in my chair as helpless as a babe. The clock struck more than once, and still I sat there, trying to think what it was I had to do. At last the clock struck twelve, and I started to my feet, as though I had just woke out of a waking sleep, and went about my work as usual."

Ronald did not continue his questions; his attention seemed to be drawn to another matter; his head was bent forward, in the attitude of listening.

I do not recollect what it was that Rivers said at this point, but he had spoken a few words when Ronald cried:

"Be silent!"

His voice was agitated, and the same feeling of expectation stole upon me as I had experienced before the female in her white nightdress opened her bedroom window and stretched out her arms toward us.

"Mme. Bernstein," said Ronald then, "the young lady we have been speaking of is a musician."

"Yes, sir."

"She plays in the night sometimes."

"I have heard her, sir, on two or three occasions."

"The instrument she pays on is the zither."

"Yes, sir."

"She is playing at the present moment."

"If you say so, sir. My hearing is not so good as yours."

"It is Beatrice who is playing," said Ronald, and his tone now was very quiet. "I knew she was not dead, and that we should meet again."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DR. COOPER IS IMPRESSED.

THESE startling words caused us to throw aside the restraint we had placed upon our movements. We darted forward to the gate, from which spot we could just catch the faint sounds of music. The truth burst upon me like a flash of light. The mystery of Beatrice's supposed death was made clear to me, and the unspeakable villainy of which Mr. Nisbet was guilty was revealed. But alas for poor Barbara, who was eagerly waiting to embrace her sister Molly!

Mme. Bernstein joined us at the gate, and cautioned us to be careful not to speak aloud. We removed to a safe distance, and were about to discuss our plans and decide upon our course of action when Ronald settled the matter for us.

"Mme. Bernstein," he said, addressing her, "the lady is a dear friend of mine; she was to have been my wife. A foul wrong has been done to her, and Providence has directed our steps here to save her. We must enter that ill-fated house to-night."

"To-night!" she exclaimed.

"Now—this moment," said Ronald, with decision.

"But the danger——"

"We are four men to two," said Ronald. "If I place my hands on one of the monsters I will account for him, blind as I am. We are armed, and no danger threatens us. An innocent lady's life is in peril; she lies at the mercy of wretches who have no heart or conscience, and a moment's delay may be fatal. You shall be well paid for the service, madame——"

"It is not that I shall be well paid," she interrupted. "I have a heart, I have a conscience. It is because the master is a dangerous man. But you shall have your way; the Just God will help you. Tread softly; make no noise."

"Mr. Elsdale is right," whispered Rivers to me as we followed Mme. Bernstein. "Strike the iron while it's hot. There's a surprise in store for two scoundrels to-night."

We succeeded in making our entrance without awaking the enemy.

"What now shall be done?" asked Mme. Bernstein.

Ronald answered her. "Mlle. Mersac—it is not her name, but that matters little—has no aversion to you, madame?"

"None, none," she replied eagerly.

"You will go to her room, and remain with her till you hear from us. If she is awake, encourage her to sleep. She must know nothing till daylight. Should it be needed call to us for assistance."

"Yes, yes."

"You will show us the rooms in which your master and his friend from London sleep, and you will then leave us." Ronald turned to us. "I and my uncle will keep watch outside Mr. Nisbet's door; if he comes out to us I shall know how to deal with him. You, Mr. Rivers and Mr. Emery, will introduce yourselves to Dr. Cooper, and endeavor to force a confession from him. If he will not speak —well, you are a match for him. Bind him, so that he shall be unable to move; then join us, and we will make Mr. Nisbet secure. He must administer no more stupefying drugs to his stepdaughter; his power over her is at an end. Have you any objection to my plan, Mr. Rivers?"

"None. It is the best that can be adopted. Let us set about it."

With noiseless footsteps we ascended the stairs to the sleeping apartments, Mme. Bernstein leading the way. She pointed out the rooms to us. "That is the master's; that is his friend's." Then she left us, and went to Beatrice's room. Bob and Ronald took their station outside Mr. Nisbet's door

and I observed that Bob held his revolver in his hand. No indication reached us that we had disturbed the inmates.

"It is our turn, now," Rivers whispered to me. "I think I know how to manage our customer."

He tried the door, and finding it locked, smiled as he said, "Locks himself in. Doesn't trust his host. A good sign." He did not knock, but kept fumbling at the handle, in order to attract Dr. Cooper's attention. Presently succeeding, we heard the doctor get out of bed.

"Who is there?" he asked softly, his ear at the door.

"Let me in," Rivers replied, in a whisper. "I have something to say to you. Why do you lock your door?"

Had Rivers spoken above a whisper Dr. Cooper would have detected him, but whispers are very much alike, and it is not easy to distinguish a man's voice by them.

"Wait a moment," said Dr. Cooper from within. "I will strike a light."

This accomplished, he opened the door, which, as we glided in, Rivers quickly closed and locked. Dr. Cooper had retreated from the door, and stood, holding the candle above his head. With an exclamation of alarm he let the candle slip from his hand, and we were in darkness.

"What a clumsy fellow you are!" exclaimed Rivers in a jocose tone. "Light it again, Mr. Emery. I have got Dr. Cooper quite safe."

And I saw, when I had picked up the candle and lighted it, Dr. Cooper standing quite still, with his arms pinned to his sides from behind by Rivers. I placed the candle out of the doctor's reach, and Rivers released him.

Dr. Cooper was in his nightshirt, and presented anything but a pleasant picture. Rivers, on the contrary, had an airy lightness about him which was new to me. His eyes shone, and he rubbed his hands together, as if he were taking part in a peculiarly agreeable function. On a table by the bedside were a glass and a bottle of whisky, half empty. Rivers put the bottle to his nose.

"Scotch," he said. "I always drink Scotch myself."

"Who are you?" Dr. Cooper managed to say. "What do you want?"

"All in good time, doctor," replied Rivers. "It's no good commencing in the middle of the game. You haven't the pleasure of my acquaintance yet, but you know this gentleman."

"I have seen him once before," said Dr. Cooper, with a troubled glance at me.

"And I am positive you must have enjoyed his

society. He proves that he enjoyed yours by his anxiety to renew the intimacy. He is a private gentleman, I am a private detective, and we have come a long way to see you. But you will catch cold standing there with only your shirt on. Will you get into your clothes or into bed before we have our chat. You would like to dress? You shall. Softly, softly. I will hand you your clothes, taking the precaution to empty your pockets first."

"By what right——"

"Steady does it, doctor. If you talk of rights we shall talk of wrongs. That's a sensible man. On go the trousers, on goes the waistcoat, on goes the coat, and we're ready for business. Now, how shall it be? Friends or foes? You don't answer. Very good. We'll give you time. Take a chair, and make yourself comfortable. No, doctor, no; don't take your whisky neat; as an experienced toper myself I insist upon putting a little water into it. And we'll pour half the spirit back into the bottle. Moderation and economy—that's the order of the day. You can't make up your mind to speak. Very well; we'll see if we can loosen your tongue. *I* intend to make a clean breast of it, and you may feel disposed presently to follow a good example. Give me your best attention. I am going to open the

case, and if I make mistakes I'm open to correction. Some few years ago there lived in the north of London a gentleman—we'll be polite, if nothing else—a gentleman and his stepdaughter, name of the gentleman Nisbet, name of the stepdaughter Beatrice. The house they inhabited was in Lamb's Terrace, and a gentleman of means could not have selected a more desolate locality to reside in. Miss Beatrice's mother was dead, and in her will she appointed her second husband—she couldn't very well appoint her first, doctor—guardian to her child, with a handsome provision for the maintenance and education of the young lady. The bulk of her fortune she left to her daughter, who was to come into possession of it when she was of age. It was a large fortune, some fifty or sixty thousand pounds, I believe, and I wish such a bit of luck had fallen to my share, but we can't all be born with silver spoons in our mouths, can we, doctor? That this fortune should have been left to the lady instead of the gentleman annoyed and angered him, and he determined to have the fingering of it. Now, how could that be managed? There was only one way, according to his thinking, and that was, to get rid of the lady, because it was set down in the will that, in the event of the young lady's death before she came of age, the money should revert to

him. He laid his plans artfully, but there was a flaw in them, as you will presently confess. I don't pretend to understand how it was that he set about compassing his desire in the crooked way he did. Perhaps he found the young lady hard to manage; because he had some sort of sneaking feeling for her, perhaps he thought it would not be half so bad if he got rid of someone else in her place; and so contrived that it should be believed it was his own stepdaughter who was dead, instead of a poor, friendless young girl of her own age and build."

Dr. Cooper shifted uneasily in his chair, and an expression of amazement stole into his face.

"I see that I am interesting you. This poor friendless girl was in his service in Lamb's Terrace at the time, her name, Molly. So what did this Nisbet do but send his stepdaughter from the house, and take a ticket for her to some part of the Continent, precise place unknown, but doubtless where she was pretty well out of the world. He was to follow her, and they were to live in foreign parts. Meanwhile the poor girl Molly was left in the London house, and on the morning of his intended departure was found dead, not in her own bed, but in the young lady's, with the young lady's clothes on and about her. The cause of death was

said to be asphyxiation by an escape of gas in the young lady's bedroom. The Nisbets kept no society in London, and had no friends or acquaintances, so there was no one to dispute his statement that it was his stepdaughter who was dead. Now, he knew that an inquest would have to be held, and that a certificate of the cause of death would have to be produced, so what does he do but go to a miserable wretch of a doctor or apothecary living or starving—the latter, I suspect—in the neighborhood of Lamb's Terrace, and by plausible words and bribes induce him to give this necessary death certificate. Name of doctor, Cooper. Fire away, doctor, if you've anything to say."

"It has been done again and again," said Dr. Cooper, sucking his parched lips. "But I can't speak till I've had a drink."

"Here it is," said Rivers, mixing a glass, sparing with the whisky and liberal with the water, and handing it to the wretched man. "Don't swallow it all at once; moisten your lips with it now and then."

"It has been done again and again," repeated Dr. Cooper. "A doctor is called in who has not attended the patient; he sees that the cause of death is unmistakable, and he gives the certificate. It is not a crime."

"I am not so sure of that," said Rivers, in a dry tone. "Anyway it is too late now to prove the true cause of poor Molly's death, for the body has been cremated."

"It was not a case of illness," continued Dr. Cooper; "no doctor had been in the house to see the girl before that morning, and I only did what any other doctor would have done."

"You did," corrected Rivers, "what no respectable doctor would dream of doing."

"I was in debt," pursued Dr. Cooper, "I was in trouble on all sides, I had a large family to support, and no food to give them. He came to me, and I was glad to earn a pound or two. I had never seen him before that morning, I had never even heard of him. What is this story you are telling me of another girl being put into his daughter's bed? It is false; I do not believe it."

"It is true," I said, "and it can be proved, for the young lady lives."

"May I drop dead off this chair if I knew it!" cried Dr. Cooper, with trembling outstretched hands. "How *was* I to know it when I had never seen the lady, when I had never seen the girl, when I had never seen him before that morning?"

Notwithstanding the feeling of loathing with which he inspired me, I had no doubt that he was

speaking the truth, and that he was not implicated in the conspiracy. He presented a pitiable and degrading spectacle as he sat trembling and writhing in his chair.

"I will go on to the end," said Rivers, "and you will find that you have something else to explain. The inquest was held, and you gave false evidence at it."

"You can't prove that it was false," said Dr. Cooper. "There is no body to exhume, and there is no one to give evidence against me. You may be right in the other parts of the story, but you will never be able to prove yourself right in this. I know sufficient of the law to know that no crime can be brought home to me for which I can be made to suffer."

"Perhaps you do know the law," said Rivers dryly, and I fancied that he felt himself at a disadvantage here, "and perhaps you don't. One thing is certain. You may escape, but there is no possibility of escape for the infernal scoundrel you have served, and who has brought you over from London to assist him in some other diabolical scheme."

"Stop a minute," exclaimed Dr. Cooper, bending forward and fixing his bloodshot eyes on Rivers' face. "Didn't I see you on the boat?"

"It is more than probable," answered Rivers, with a sly chuckle, "for I was there."

"You followed us?"

"Every step of the way. If you had looked for me you would have seen me on the train. What do you say now? Are we friends or foes?"

"Friends," cried Dr. Cooper eagerly. "Friends. I am on your side. I will conceal nothing."

Was it my fancy that there was a movement in the wall between the room we were in and that occupied by Mr. Nisbet? It must have been, I thought, for upon looking more closely I saw nothing to confirm the fancy, and I ascribed it to the fever and excitement of the scene of which I was a witness.

"You are wise," said Rivers, "though I take it upon myself to declare that, with or without your assistance, we can bring his guilt home to him. There are others in the house as well as ourselves. Two of our friends are at this moment stationed outside Mr. Nisbet's door. He is doomed, if ever man was. If he knows a prayer it is time for him to say it."

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. NISBET TAKES A DECIDED STEP.

"THE evidence, then, you gave at the inquest," continued Rivers, "whether false or true (you see I am not disposed to be hard on you), was conclusive, and doubtless you were well paid for it. In the eyes of the law Mr. Nisbet's stepdaughter was dead, and he came into her fortune. The simplicity of the whole thing would be amusing if it were not tragic. But his task was not yet finished. He had committed an error of judgment in killing the wrong woman; the lady whom he had robbed of her fortune still lived, and it was imperative that he should get rid of her. He must have been in fear of detection, or he would have adopted some violent and summary measures to compass his objects. Being fearful of consequences he determined to kill her slowly, and it was also necessary that he should destroy her memory, that he should make her mind a blank, for if by any chance the news of the tragedy which had taken place in Lamb's Terrace reached her knowledge the game

would be lost. According to the way I reason it out he hoped that the drugs he administered to her would cause her to die a presumably natural death, but the lady was obstinate, and refused to die as he wished. At length, weary of waiting, he calls you in to assist him."

"You are on the wrong track," said Dr. Cooper. "I have never seen the lady."

"You are in your right senses, I presume," said Rivers. "The lady happens to be in this house."

"In this house?"

"Do you wish us to believe you have not seen her?"

"On my honor, I have not seen her." At this reference to his honor a queer smile crossed Rivers' lips. "There is a female here, as I was given to understand by Mr. Nisbet, one of his domestics, who was indisposed. But I have seen no one except Mr. Nisbet and an old woman who cooks for him, and with whom I have not exchanged a single word. Mr. Nisbet informed me that he wanted my assistance in certain chemical experiments he intended to make in Switzerland, and I consented to accompany him. It was a sudden proposition, and I had to make up my mind on the spur of the moment. When I first made his acquaintance he promised to assist me and set me up

in a good way of business, but after the inquest I lost sight of him, and his promises were not fulfilled. Coming upon me suddenly a week ago in London, he said if I would assist him that he would fulfill his old promises. I would have come with him without this assurance. I was doing no business in London, and I was in debt; I have always been in debt everywhere; I am the most unfortunate wretch in existence. Now you have the truth of it."

"What were you and Mr. Nisbet doing to-night before you went to bed?"

"What do you mean?"

"It is a plain question. You and he were together in this room. You poured some drops from a vial into a glass. Mr. Nisbet took the glass from you, dipped his finger into it, and tasted the stuff; then he threw the contents of the glass out of the window."

"You know everything," gasped Dr. Cooper, falling back in his chair in consternation.

"You are not far out. What were you doing? What was in the vial?"

"A deadly poison. The drops I poured into the glass would put an end to a man's life in a few seconds, and it would be next to impossible to discover the cause of death."

"An interesting experiment. If it would put an end to a man's life it would put an end to a woman's. Are you a double-dyed knave, or an egregious fool? Do you not see the crime your accomplice was meditating?"

"I am not his accomplice," cried Dr. Cooper in a violent tone. "He told me he wanted to try it upon some animals."

"A likely story. This deadly poison was to be administered to his stepdaughter. He paved the way by informing the old woman in this house that the young lady is sinking fast. He is caught in his own trap. Where is the vial?"

"Mr. Nisbet has it."

At this moment I saw confirmed the fancy I had entertained of a movement in the wall between the bedrooms. A panel was softly and noiselessly pushed, and Mr. Nisbet's face appeared. It was of an ashen whiteness; he must have overheard every word of the conversation. As his eyes met mine he swiftly retreated; the panel closed, and then came the sound of the snap of a lock.

"What was that?" cried Rivers, starting up.

I told him hurriedly what I had seen, and he went to the wall and examined it.

"It is a cunning contrivance," he said, "and is hidden somewhere in these wide beadings." He

pushed against the wall without effect. "You, too," he added grimly to Dr. Cooper, "might never have left the house alive. Let us finish the night's work. You will come out with us. Leave the door open, and set that chair against it, in case he slips in here, and tries to make his escape. We will take the law into our own hands. I never travel without the darbies."

He took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and put them back with a satisfied smile.

We joined Ronald and Bob in the passage, and questioned them. Mr. Nisbet had made no attempt to open his door, but Bob had peeped through the keyhole a few minutes after he had taken up his station, being attracted by the glimmering of a light in the room, which he accepted as a proof that Mr. Nisbet was awake. By means of this light he had obtained a partial view of the room, but before he could catch sight of Mr. Nisbet the keyhole was masked from within, and he could see nothing more.

"Mr. Nisbet!" Rivers called out as he rapped smartly at the door.

We listened for an answer, but received none, and Rivers repeated his summons several times in vain. No movement within the room reached our ears. We did not make more noise than was abso-

lutely necessary, but it brought Mme. Bernstein out, to whom Ronald explained what we were doing, and hoped we were not alarming Beatrice.

"Oh, no," said Mme. Bernstein, "she is sleeping like an angel."

Did she know her lover was near her, I thought, and that she was saved from the dread peril with which she had been threatened? The mysterious adventure which had led up to the present strange scene in a foreign land warranted such a thought. Little, indeed, do we know of the unseen world by which we are surrounded, little do we understand of the occult influences which direct the most pregnant actions of our lives. Often during the past twenty-four hours had I looked toward the ground in the anticipation of seeing the spectral figure which had prompted every step I had taken in this mystery, but I had seen nothing of it, and I was tempted to believe, its mission being accomplished, that it had left me forever. Though a more fitting place might be found to mention it, I may state here that my impression was correct. From that day to this, when in my London home I am engaged in writing the particulars of the mysterious crime which, through the agency of the supernatural visitation, I was the means of bringing to light, I have never set eyes on the supernatural apparition.

I return now to my companions, who, in the silence of Mr. Nisbet, were debating what it was best to do. If we burst open the door of his bedroom we should awake Beatrice, and the shock might produce serious consequences.

"He may have escaped by the window," suggested Bob.

Rivers shook his head. "He could not do so without breaking his limbs. This floor is some distance from the ground, and a dead straight wall stretches down the back of the house."

"There may be other panels in the walls of his room opening in other directions."

"That is more likely. It is stupid to wait here and do nothing. I have picked a lock before to-night. Here goes."

Down he plumped on his knees, and set to work with his own knife and ours which we handed him. One or another of us held a candle to the keyhole while he worked. It was a long job and a tough job, and he was at it for thirty or forty minutes, but he managed it at last.

"Be prepared for a rush," he said, in a tone of warning, as he slowly pushed the door open.

No such experience awaited us. The door was wide open, and we stood together on the threshold.

"He has left the candle alight, at all events," said Rivers. "Follow me, and look out."

We entered the room close upon each other's heels.

Leaning back in an armchair by the table was Mr. Nisbet. His eyes were closed, and we were face to face with the murderer. His features were perfectly calm and composed.

"How can he sleep so peacefully at such a moment as this?" whispered Bob.

"Yes," said Rivers, stepping forward, "he sleeps peacefully."

Dr. Cooper also stepped forward, and put his ear to Mr. Nisbet's mouth, and his hand to his heart.

"Dead?" asked Rivers.

"Dead," replied Dr. Cooper.

Rivers lifted from the carpet an empty vial which had fallen from the dead man's hand, and held it up to the doctor with a questioning look. Dr. Cooper nodded.

. . . . .

But little more remains to be told.

Beatrice was taken back to England, and under medical care recovered her memory. But she recollects very little of the years she passed in peril of her life. The chief part of her fortune was saved, and she and Ronald are married. Barbara

is in their service. The poor child suffered much when the truth was revealed to her, but time healed her sorrow, and she has a happy home.

Dr. Cooper disappeared from London, and none of us knew, or cared to know, what became of him. Ronald provided for Mme. Bernstein.

My good wife and I live in our old home. We never intend to move. Nothing in the world could tempt Maria to enter an empty house. Between ourselves and Mr. and Mrs. Elsdale exists a firm friendship, and we, seldom without Bob, are frequently together; but we never refer to the strange incidents which have ended so happily.

THE END.